

COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW

March / April 2015 • cjr.org

PLUS

Why the White House press corps
doesn't know the president

Survival strategies of a
Web freelancer

How Snowden creates a new
paradigm for leakers

steal this idea

Why plagiarize when

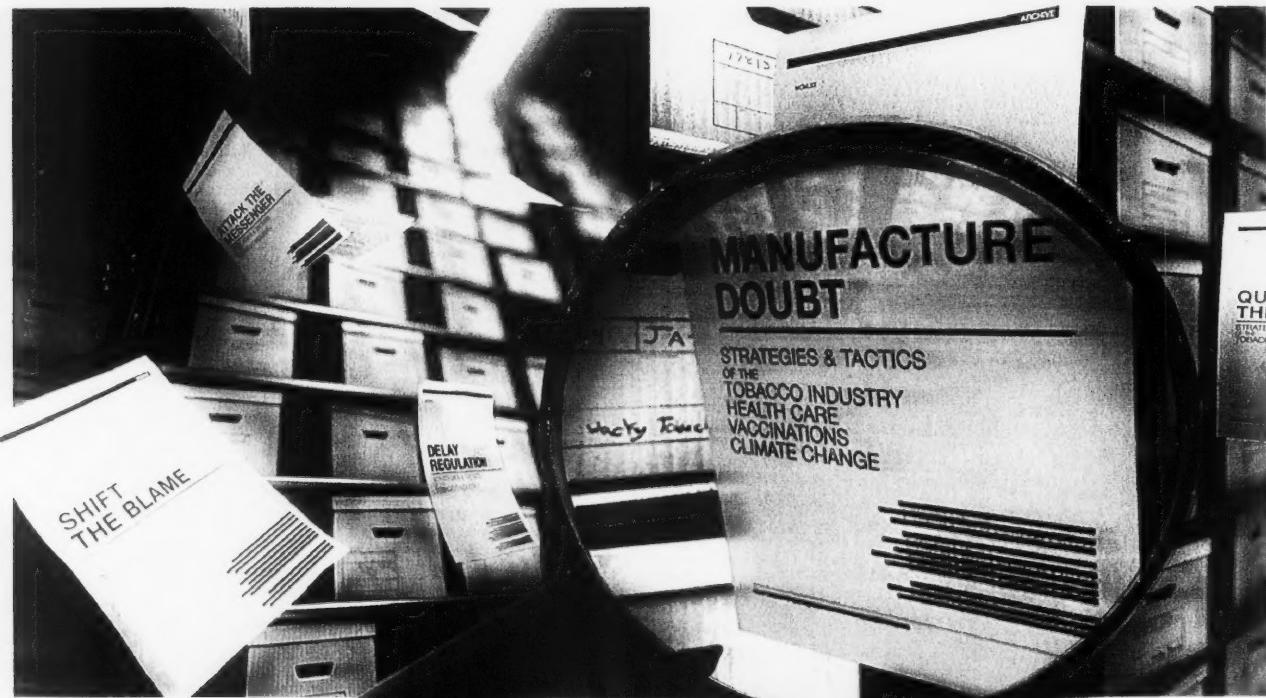
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ROBERT KENNER

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COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW

March/April 2015



"To assess the performance of journalism ... to help stimulate continuing improvement in the profession, and to speak out for what is right, fair, and decent."

—from the founding editorial, 1961

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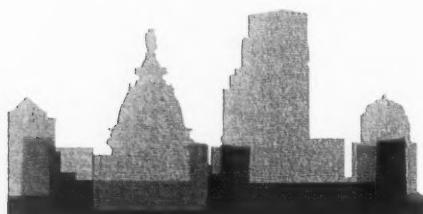
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Opening Shot



Pictures are worth 1,000 words—or at least they used to be. Images come cheap in the digital news market, with iPhone snapshots saturating social media and high-quality cameras becoming more affordable for amateurs eager to get published. Many newsrooms have responded by slashing photo staffs. In 2013, the *Chicago Sun-Times* justified axing its entire 28-person team, including Pulitzer Prize-winner John H. White, with a supposed shift toward online video. (The newspaper has since rehired four of those photographers and laid off its video team.) Publications now rely more heavily on freelance work or wire images. “User-generated content” fills in the cracks. Quality suffers.

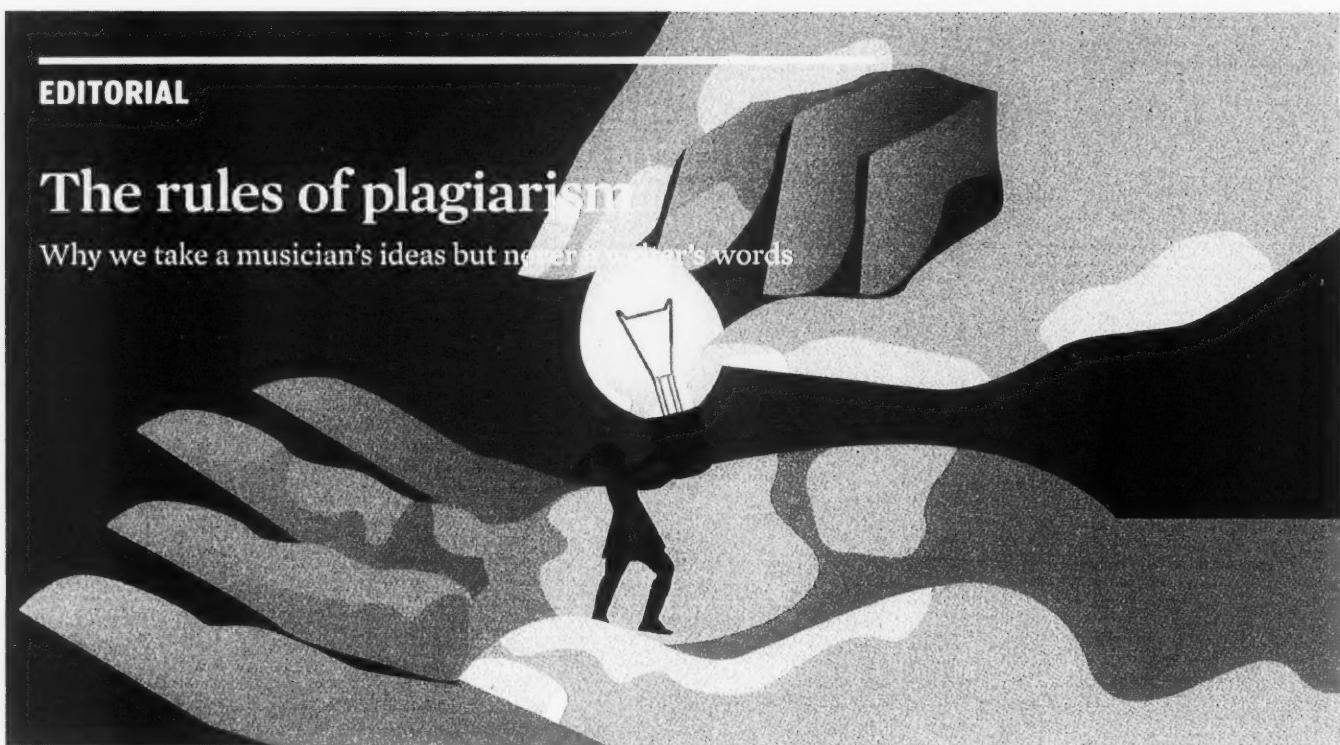
The danger isn’t that we’ll see fewer photos in the news—*Sports Illustrated* cutting its staff photographers this year won’t prevent it from shooting any Super Bowls. The real threat to photojournalism is the decline of storytelling by way of still images, whose unique impact lies in the ability to record the emotion of a specific moment that speaks to a larger truth. Staff photographers are more often afforded the resources needed to grab that fleeting nuance. With today’s news in seemingly perpetual motion—be it constant breaking news alerts on cable or bite-sized nuggets on Twitter—the power of capturing infinitely brief points in time endures. **CJR**

Hope Born from the optimistic ideal of postwar urban renewal programs, Chicago’s Cabrini-Green housing projects eventually became an emblem of urban poverty and despair. Still, photographer John H. White highlighted joy amid the anguish in his acclaimed 1981 series.

EDITORIAL

The rules of plagiarism

Why we take a musician's ideas but never his or her words



One of my favorite musicians is the mythical Bob Dylan, a man of singular talent who gave birth to a strand of acoustic rock so compelling that it made others want to rip it off. And so they did. By the hundreds. His work became an inspiration for Bruce Springsteen, Lucinda Williams, Jimi Hendrix, Johnny Cash, and Kurt Cobain, all legends in their own right. They borrowed elements of his lyrical style or his rhythmic pacing and mixed it with their own. They took his ideas,

just as Dylan lifted the ideas of Civil War poet Henry Timrod, the freed slaves' spiritual song "No More Auction Block for Me," and the oral history of a Japanese Yakuza gangster.

Wrote Salon music critic Noah Berlatsky, "Given his status as ultimate awesome courageous rock God, Dylan has influenced just about everybody. And, inevitably, too... many of those he's influenced have outshone him."

What's this blasphemy? Gone on to surpass him? After pilfering his work? Well, as anyone who's ever turned on a radio can tell you, that's precisely what the world of music expects artists to do: Take something that wasn't theirs, mix in their own ingenuity, and build a road to the next breakthrough genre. It is generally viewed by the robbed musician not so much as a reason to gripe than as a time to accept flattery. After all, copycats breathe more life into ideas that might otherwise fade.

Chronic music thieves make their own genre. They're called cover bands, and I've seen good ones pack a club even on a Monday night. When you think about it, it's a defensible approach, this notion of one person's ingenuity leading to another's.

In journalism, we don't want anything to do with such thinking. We call that kind of conduct plagiarism, and it is the difference between these two perspectives that gives

rise to our cover story this issue. It boils down to this: The taking of ideas is generally sanctioned, but taking someone's words is scorned.

Writer Marc Fisher examines the confounding state of plagiarism at a moment when editors are struggling to define the term, explain the rules to their writers, and mete out punishments for those who cross the line. The debate was ignited most recently by allegations of plagiarism against international affairs columnist Fareed Zakaria and author Malcolm Gladwell. Purists aligned on the side of the (anonymous) accusers, plagiaristic progressives on the side of the accused.

Unfortunately, rather than engaging in an intellectual debate about these issues, many top editors are cleaving to an old and rigid definition of plagiarism—labeling it "the unforgivable sin"—while building large staffs dedicated to aggregating without attribution. It's not that stealing another writer's work is proper. It isn't. It's that editors don't clearly define when circumstances allow reporters to take material from others and when they do not. Do the circumstances matter? Is lifting several consecutive paragraphs of exquisite writing the same as not bothering to rephrase a sentence from a report? To my mind, the latter is laziness; the former is theft.

But in many newsrooms, the editors seem to have just one ruler they use to measure every infraction, an approach that has passed its prime.

Fisher deftly and delightfully takes on these questions in his piece. Chief among those is whether journalism is so different from other creative terrain that we must hew to standards that are being relaxed in other parts of our culture. A good question, though it's not mine. I stole it from Fisher.

—Elizabeth Spayd



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Under cover

This is a blatant disregard for democracy ("21st-Century censorship" January/February). The press should be penalized for it. It is happening in my hometown of Columbus, GA. More lies than facts are printed in the media that some people still trust. The Columbus, GA media is so biased that I do not believe the obituary column anymore.

Nadine

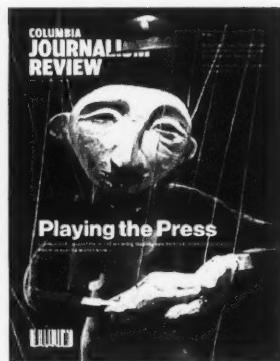
Smart piece. Government interference in news is not new even in America. The apartheid regime in South Africa tried to secretly buy the *Washington Star* newspaper using a front and later bought half of *The Sacramento Union* as part of its worldwide campaign to blunt criticism of its racist policies.

This article is a good example of why I have been renewing my subscription to CJR for more than four decades.

David Cay Johnston

Two sides, same coin

I find it so interesting that this piece ("Pissing in his own pool," January/February) portrays mainstream Canadian media as somehow falling behind their American peers when it comes to transparency. Survey independent observers like activists and they will be the first to tell you that if there's a media bubble anywhere on earth right now it is here in the US. Yet we have no one who comes close to filling Jesse Brown's arms-length shoes in objectively reporting/assessing how well mainstream media outlets and journalists perform in this arena beyond trade press like CJR. The reality is that it is commonplace for American reporters every year to do exactly what Murphy and Mansbridge did in ways large and small. More than a few accept fees to give speeches, serve as conference panelists, consult as experts on particular topics and issues, get book contracts and freelance writing gigs, etc. from industry and other commercial interests that pose clear potential conflicts



'I have a feeling the government spies on its "free press" a lot more than we know.'

when it comes to carrying out their day jobs. There's no one in America, at least not with a national audience who "scrutinizes the ever-conglomerating media" marketplace with the same objectivity, sharp eye, willingness to tackle sacred cows, and results as Brown.

Blue Heron

I suppose I should have seen the controversial quote about "f---ing rocket science" (September/October 2013) on your cover as a red flag. CJR style continues to cross the line in the new issue: The crude title of the Jesse Brown profile ("Pissing in his own pool") is offensive, and by the fourth paragraph there's a puerile elevator analogy that attempts to describe Brown's effect on Canada's media world ("Brown, 37, has stepped onto the Canadian media's tiny, packed elevator, and while others wrinkle their noses and keep quiet, he asks, 'Who farted?'")

For CJR to retain credibility, it will have to adopt a higher tone.

Jay Harvey

Fit to print?

The topic sentence of this story ("The public interest" January/February) is the one where Abramson acknowledges that the *Times* sat on the Snowden materials for a year. Yes, the same newspaper that gave us Judith Miller on Iraq also gave us months of supine acquiescence in the NSA's unconstitutional intrusions into our lives. For its former executive editor to wrap herself in the ancient glory of the Pentagon Papers is to misconstrue what the *Times* is today—a pillar of the establishment that occasionally and mildly scolds the latter from a position perhaps 3 microns left of center.

Dave Clemens

Snowden was not in a security position that would have qualified him to make decisions like that: "Snowden himself has said he was careful in what documents he chose for disclosure so as not to needlessly harm intelligence gathering."

His statement is, at best, disingenuous and, at worst, deeply unethical.

As for Abramson's statement: "Is the public better off knowing about the government's secret massive eavesdropping programs? The answer is an unqualified yes. Has publication of these stories harmed national security? So far, the government has offered scant evidence that it has." Yeah, well, the American public knew about surveillance programs since the Patriot Act but, in their patriotic fervor, forgot to read the law's fine print. Congress also acted disingenuously by not giving the American public the time and the opportunity to debate the grave implications of surveillance acts since 9/11.

In general, the public's right to know about eavesdropping programs is a maybe, not an unqualified yes. Try governing a country. As for the government having scant evidence about the harm to national security caused by Snowden revelations in particular, it's pretty hubristic to claim that, since you are a journalist,

not someone in the high spheres of government or in the intelligence community to determine when and how national security has been harmed.

I'm no hawk and I'm not condoning the eavesdropping programs. I'm a concerned citizen asking for moderation.

Mario Chávez

There is reference here to the feds possibly spying on the people reading the Snowden material. This needs to be unpacked and perhaps become its own story, either by Abramson or other journalists. How much spying by the government on the press does the *Times* know takes place? Assumes? What precautions do they take? What does it mean? What about the rest of us? And even if there isn't ironclad evidence for how much the government spies on the media, how about a little informed speculation? Based on this story and others that have come out recently, I have a feeling the government spies on its "free press" a lot more than we know. And I think the press would do us a favor if they told us what they think is really going on.

Jim

The new rules

Chris Hughes ("The product," January/February) is just another example of a wealthy young techie buying a new toy just because he can—with no understanding or respect whatsoever for history, tradition, journalism, etc. Ideally he'd have bought it, put his name on the masthead, and then stepped back and let the publishing professionals run it.

PiedType

Correction

In the piece "Is that you?" (January/February), CJR wrote about a company called NewsBios that sells personal dossiers on reporters. One of those reporters, Dyan Machan, told CJR she had not donated to Hillary Clinton's 2007 presidential campaign, and believed she gave more than \$500 to Barack Obama, as NewsBios had claimed. According to Federal Election Commission filings, the official source documenting political campaign donations, Machan had in fact contributed \$1,000 to Clinton's campaign and \$500 to Obama's, as NewsBios stated in its dossier. **CJR**

NOTES FROM OUR ONLINE READERS

Today's piece ("The problem with sharing uncredited photos," December 2014) hits home. Getting credit for my graphic work takes constant vigilance.

I don't ask for money and—under these particular circumstances—the DMCA isn't useful.

Most of my work is high-resolution digital restoration of historic images. In many instances the unedited original is nearly unviewable.

All I ask of any publisher is that they credit the extensive labor this restoration work represents. Wikipedia lists restoration credit when these images run on the site's main page. No one else does without prompting.

Responses from publishers have been mixed: *Ms. Magazine* amended the credit line immediately with a polite response. *Time* never responded, not even after repeated calls to their office.

It is a substantial disincentive to undertake this work—which can take 20 to 30 hours per image.

Lise Broer

As commentators have observed elsewhere, sacralizing the offending cartoons from *Charlie Hebdo* ("The missing Charlie Hebdo cartoons," January 2015) by re-publishing is a misunderstanding of what is required of a free press. These cartoons are satire that does not lend itself to becoming icons of virtue. Indeed, they are anti-iconic by their nature and thus don't need to be idealized as if they were substitutes for or exemplified our ideals. The right to publish must be upheld, but if some news organizations chose to exercise civility and tolerance, which are just as essential to democracy as the right of free expression of that which is obscene and contemptuous, then that is their right, too. Acts that provoke violence often may be defensible, but we do not prove our virtue or solidarity through repetition any more than we uphold the right of free speech by the endless utterance of obscenities. Imagining new forms of satire might be more appropriate.

Julian

Everybody I know, of all ages, likes Jon Stewart ("Why the media will miss Jon Stewart," February 2015). And why would you assume this is the "twilight" of his career. You're a futurist now? He may well become truly important rather than just head-nodding entertainment now that he's moving on.

I love the guy but has his work led to social change? No. Maybe it will now.
Clyde Smith

Just goes to show ("What journalists can learn from the faux CNN threat," January 2015) some of the dangers inherent with using social media as a news-gathering tool. How many people actually think *The Colbert Report* is real news? Hello, it's on Comedy Central for a reason. We should always use caution and our journalist ethics when following these types of stories.

Guy Priel

A bit more info regarding the cost of Burning Man ("When Burning Man is your beat," January 2015) tickets: The vast majority of tickets to Burning Man are \$390. A limited number of \$800 tickets are sold, with the proceeds used to offset the sale of 4,000 low-income tickets at \$190 each. In addition, some tickets are offered for free to a limited number of people who have a demonstrated history of volunteering huge amounts of time to help set up, manage, and break down the event.

Is it cheap to attend Burning Man? No. Should the new Black Rock City beat reporter follow the money? Yes. But hopefully this more complete information will discourage additional derisive suggestions that this "utopia" is only for those who can afford an \$800 ticket.

John Moyers

Currents

The new *New Republic*

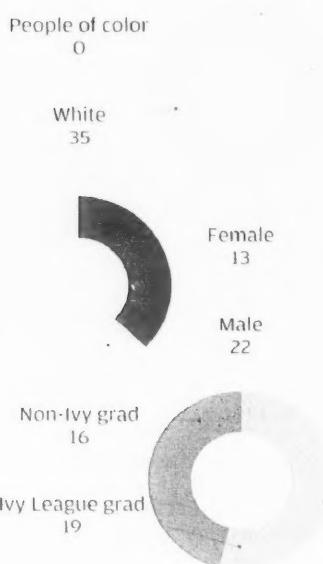
BY DAVID UBERTI
& CHRIS IP

Beginning in December, the implosion of *The New Republic* was shocking in its totality. The departure of 23 staff writers and editors—in addition to researchers, assistants, and contributing editors—forced the political magazine to temporarily halt publication. It was the exodus that launched a thousand takes, as liberal thinkers mourned the supposed death of a progressive institution. Yet in early February, *The New Republic* returned to newsstands with a new-look masthead. CJR took stock of the TNR fallout: where some former staffers landed and the demographics of those who replaced them.

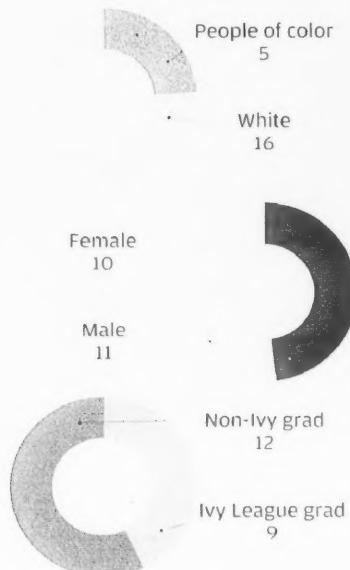
Ex-staffers



Old New Republic



New New Republic



In his first letter from the editor, Gabriel Snyder pledged diversity under his stewardship of *The New Republic*. With the release of the first magazine and masthead since the staff shakeup, here is how the new editorial staff breaks down compared to the old.

Source: *The New Republic*, November 2014 and February 2015. Counts full-time editors and writers on the masthead; excludes photo, art, design, and production staff.



As journalism increasingly experiments with new platforms, *The New York Times*, ProPublica, and several other media organizations have started designing digital games that integrate journalistic reporting and tackle real-life issues in an engaging way.

In January, three fellows started a new program at the American

University School of Communication that aims to develop media leadership and explore digital games with a social focus.

CJR gathered the three—Joyce Rice, Kelli Dunlap, and Cherisse Datu—to talk about how game design can enrich journalism.

—Lene Bech Sillesen

Tell us about your backgrounds and what motivated you to apply for the fellowship.

Joyce Rice: I've been working for the past two years on *Symbolia*, which is an interactive comics journalism magazine. I think game design principles have a lot to bring to new media.

Kelli Dunlap: Before this program, I graduated with a PsyD in clinical psychology, and my research interests have pretty much always been in bringing digital tools either into the therapy room or using them to talk about mental health issues.

Cherisse Datu: I hail from Al Jazeera English and America's social media program "The Stream," where I've been lead editor for two to three years. I've noticed, as someone who's worked in journalism, and as a gamer, many gamers don't really tend to follow the news. So I figured: Why not bring the news story into the video games?

What can digital games bring to the news media?

Rice: I'm interested in seeing the ways that game design can bring a new perspective to news media that are having a lot of problems right now with decreasing engagement. Something is going to have to change about the way we are sharing and telling stories.

We're trying to get people to actually interact with and feel like they have a stake in the news, because that's not something that especially many young readers feel right now. A game puts you into a story, as a way of developing a narrative around an experience, instead of around prose.

Dunlap: Or around somebody else's experience. It's one thing to say, let's really care about World War II Germany—if you like history, that's great. Or, we'll put you in World War II Germany and in order for you to escape, you'll need to know the language, signs, everything that's necessary in that environment. Learning

becomes a tool to your objective as opposed to learning being the objective. That is what hooks people.

What are some examples of games that focus on contemporary issues?

Dunlap: Just the other day I played a game where I was given a stipend as someone living on minimum wage, and I had to see how long I could last. I didn't last three days. My dog needed to go to the vet, I went bankrupt, and I lost the game. That makes you think about poverty a little bit differently. But I think if you're outside that game sphere bubble, you don't hear about the smaller, more innovative, creative games.

Datu: And maybe we have to rethink how we get those games out there to people too. It's not just us talking to the news media, but looking at the industry as a whole. Gaming can't be an island anymore, it's time for people in the industry to push out and work with everybody else.

There's been much attention around sexism in the gaming industry, and *The New York Times* has reported that only 21 percent of game developers are female. Do the three of you signal an industry shift?

Dunlap: Even though women have always been in the industry, it's been tough, and the women are hard as nails. That has always been an inspiration for me. But it's changing, and that's the most exciting thing. I think our generation, we're just done with being excluded.

Will games become an integrated part of news media?

Rice: Definitely. Other sectors are already using game design to engage their customer base. I think it's inevitable that it will come to news media.

Build your brand

BY LENE BECH SILLESEN

According to the gospel of the online age, personal branding is key to building a career in journalism. Of all the tools journalists have at their disposal in their hunt for digital glory, the Twitter bio reigns high. But with only 160 characters available, it's not easy to strike that magical mix of informative, funny, and engaging.

The Twitter Bio Generator (twitterbiogenerator.com) parodies this struggle. Click the "Generate now" button and you'll get a mashup of the Twitterverse's most commonly used phrases: "bacon enthusiast," "professional Twitter practitioner," "explorer."

We found ourselves wondering what a real Twitter bio reworking would look like, so we asked two media marketing experts to evaluate the digital brands of some of the industry's notable figures. Here's what they came back with.

Aaron Schoenberger

Founder and chief executive of the internet marketing company
The Brainchild Group

Melissa Bell

Co-founder and executive editor of Vox.com, previously director of platforms at The Washington Post



Melissa Bell

I think you're really neat. You can reach me here or at melissa@vox.com.

Washington, D.C.
vox.com

Joined April 2007

Past experience

Mentioning an authority as widely known as The Washington Post makes people trust her more than any other random journalist on Twitter.

Current position Co-founding Vox is a big accomplishment, but her bio in no way mentions what she actually does. If someone is viewed as an influencer, they will attract a following.

Elif Batuman

Staff writer at The New Yorker, and author of the bestselling book The Possessed



Elif Batuman

Like Dostoevsky, I wrote a book called THE POSSESSED. Mine is shorter.
www.nytimes.com
NYC
www.nytimes.com
Joined March 2012

Keep the photo Bateman has done a good job in making her profile intriguing, and her photo is catchy. You'd immediately recognize it.

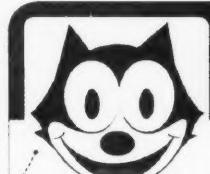
Past experience As someone who went to Stanford and Harvard, and writes for a major publication like The New Yorker, adding that to her bio would suck people in. People want to follow others who are smart, interesting, funny, and who they can actually learn from.

David Meerman Scott

Sales and marketing strategist and author of 10 books, including
The New Rules of Marketing & PR

Felix Salmon

Senior editor at Fusion, previously a financial journalist with Reuters, Euromoney, and Portfolio Magazine



Felix Salmon

To test the resolution of the young with tales of the small failings of the great, and shame the eager with ironic praise.

UT: 40.722909-73.981973

felicex.com

Joined September 2008

Add personal information

His bio doesn't say anything about who he is, which risks looking like arrogance.

Use real photo

While it is clever that he uses Felix the Cat as his photo, it doesn't let people see who he really is. Why hide? Always think: What does this photo say about me and my personal brand?

Shane Smith

Co-founder of Vice, and occasional host of the brand's videos



shane smith

I like whiskey, baths, naps, boxing and naps (you said naps twice. I like naps)
New York
www.vice.com
Joined November 2009

Be approachable

His bio doesn't mean anything to those who do not know him. It risks stating, "You should know me, so I don't need to tell you." I always say avoid the clever bio.

Stay open

Many journalists "hide" on social media. They don't put themselves out there by creating a dynamic presence. Perhaps it's because in journalism school they are taught to put their own opinions to the side.

Language Corner Caching in

"Cache," "cachet," and "cash" sound alike, and are interconnected, but maybe not in the way you think.

The oldest in English, somewhat surprisingly, is "cash."

From the Old French "casse," for a box or chest, "cash" first showed up around 1595, *The Oxford English Dictionary* says, referring to both a box and its contents of coins or other monetary instruments.

Next up is "cachet," pronounced "cash-EH." Most of us know this to mean something that indicates status or prestige, as in "his new Lexus gives him more *cachet*."

But "cachet" didn't start out so grand. It actually derives from the French "cacher," meaning "to hide." Around 1640, the *OED* says, it was used in the phrase "letter of cachet" to describe "a letter under the private seal of the French king, containing an order, often of exile or imprisonment." Not necessarily a good thing. Around 1840, the *OED* says, the English novelist William Makepeace Thackeray used it to mean a "stamp" or "distinguishing mark." It was a little over 40 years before it took on the sense of something that conferred prestige or approval.

"Cache," as you might expect, is also from "cacher." In the late 18th century, a "cache" was "a hole or mound made by American pioneers and Arctic explorers to hide stores of provisions, ammunition, etc.," the *OED* says. And it was often spelled "cash." By the mid-19th century, a "cache" was both the hiding place and the stuff being hidden.

So you can see that "cachet" and "cache" are closer cousins etymologically, while "cache" and "cash" seem more closely related by meaning. Of course, a "cache" of "cash" can confer great "cachet."

Share the wealth!

—Merrill Perlman

Hard Numbers: BuzzFeed in 2014

200 million

unique visitors a month

5

languages in which BuzzFeed publishes

25

countries from which BuzzFeed reporters filed stories

4

foreign bureaus opened:
Sydney, Berlin, Sao Paolo, and Mumbai

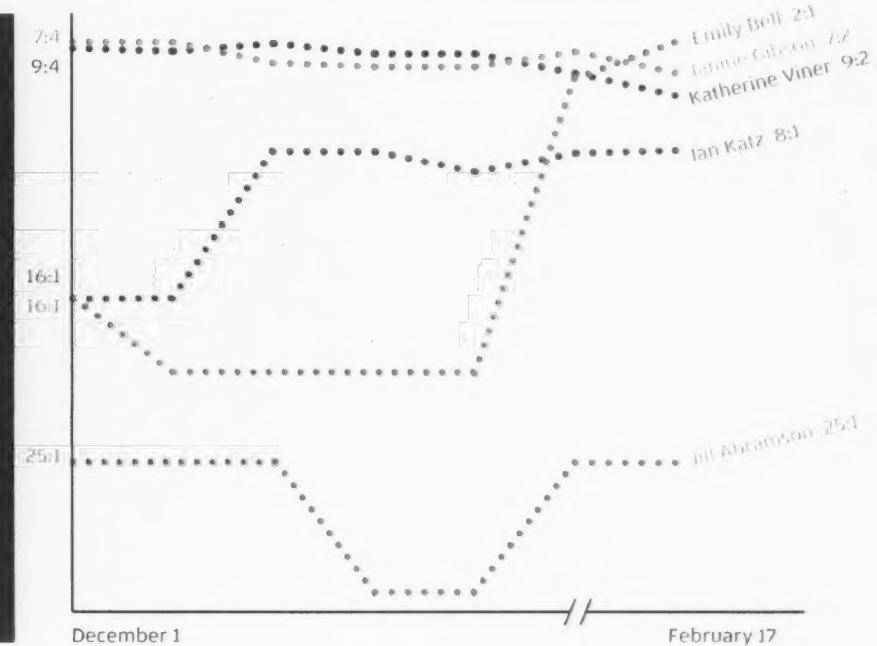
2,170

posts about cats and dogs (garnering
291 million pageviews)

Source: BuzzFeed

Follow the leader

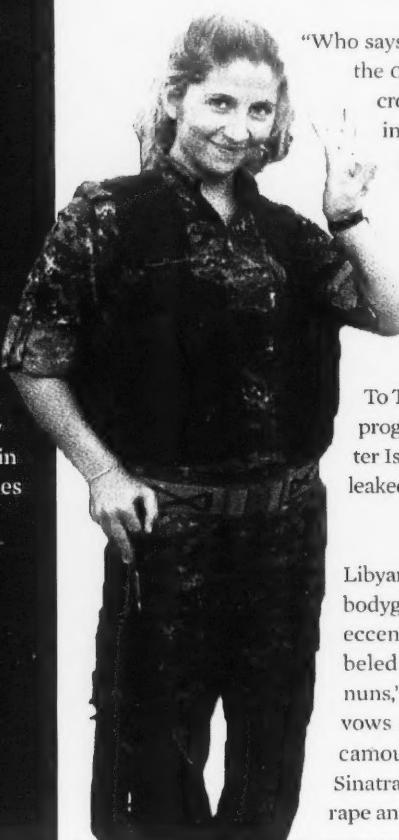
Talk is cheap when you're a media pundit. No sooner had Alan Rusbridger announced he would retire as editor in chief of *The Guardian* when speculation kicked off over who would replace him. So far, *The Independent* has tipped online editor in chief Janine Gibson. The UK's *Spectator* puts *Guardian US* head Katharine Viner "not far behind." But media prognosticators aren't the only ones with skin in the game. Irish bookmaker Paddy Power has taken 105 wagers on *The Guardian's* next top editor. For the media pundit who feels really lucky, Julian Assange is going at a remarkable 500:1. Here's how the odds have changed over time. —Chris Ip



'Combat Barbies'

BY CHRIS IP

The media loves a woman with a gun, especially if she has pinup potential. When female soldiers are in the media spotlight, stories might peg them as an exotic novelty—or just make a blatant play for clicks through photos of bombshells in uniform. Here are some recent examples from around the world.



Syria & Iraq

The narrative of Kurdish women battling the repressive, misogynistic ISIS has proven irresistible. A Foreign Policy headline called female fighters in Iraq “badass,” while pictures of “Rehana”—a grinning soldier whom the *New York Daily News* called “the poster girl of Kurdish resistance” (left)—went viral.

UK

“Who says you can’t shoot a gun and wear heels?” read the CBS lede introducing Katrina Hodge, who was crowned Miss England in 2009 and has also served in the British Army. The UK’s *Daily Telegraph* dubbed her an “all-action beauty queen.”

Israel

In Israel, where military service is mandatory for most women, a viral 2012 photo of a bikini-clad woman strapped with an assault rifle was posted on Gizmodo with the headline, “Badass Chicks In Israel Don’t Go To The Beach Without Their Gats.” Hardly the most progressive of publications, *The Sun*’s front page after Israeli soldiers’ semi-nude Facebook photos were leaked in 2013 simply read, “Gaza Strip.”

Libya

Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi’s elite, all-female bodyguards were once viewed as another marker of eccentric flamboyance by the Libyan dictator. Labeled his “Amazonian Guard” and “revolutionary nuns,” according to *GlobalPost* they reportedly took vows of virginity and were “decked in 1990s-style camouflage, nail polish, thick mascara, and Nancy Sinatra war boots.” After Gaddafi’s fall, some claimed rape and abuse by the dictator and his sons.

Failure can be fun

For sports fans, rooting for a team having a bad year is like watching Season 6 of a TV show that hasn’t been good since Season 1: After each episode (or game), you shake your head and wonder why you waste your time. For sports reporters, covering such a team can be similarly excruciating. Take this year’s Knicks, who had the NBA’s worst record as of the All-Star break.

Not only are they bad, they’re also uninteresting. They’ve provided such meager material this year that

The New York Times sent the reporter

usually assigned to the team to cover other basketball-related topics, like a group of old men who play at a YMCA.

But sometimes terrible teams are a fun to cover. CJR asked a few journalists to recall abysmal seasons past.

Reporter: Keith Pompey, *Philadelphia Inquirer*

Team: 2013-14 Philadelphia 76ers

Mark of Atrocity: 26-game losing streak (tied for the longest in NBA history), spanning Jan. 31-March 29, 2014

“They call it rubbernecking whenever you see a car accident on the other side of the road and everyone wants to drive by slow and watch it. The Sixers, when they went on that

losing streak, everyone wanted to check in and see if they lost. And when they lost 17 in a row to start this season, there was that negative excitement around them. And once they won, it was like, Okay, they’re just another bad team.”

Long attention

A horizontal timeline diagram showing various political hashtags arranged along a dotted line from left to right. The hashtags are:

- Slutgate
- Donglegate
- Tattooigate
- Seatgate
- Celebgate
- Antennagate
- Sodagate
- Fangate
- Bendgate
- Hoodiegate
- Huggate
- Bumpgate
- Napgate
- Tripgate
- Gamergate
- Deflategate
- Weinergate
- Climategate
- Bridgegate

The word "Absurd" is written vertically on the far left, and "Bridgegate" is written vertically on the far right.

Short attention

Reporter: Filip Bondy, *New York Daily News*

Team: 1983-88 Columbia Lions

Mark of Atrocity: 44-game losing streak, spanning five years

"It wasn't fun. Part of that is because you see kids in college who aren't getting paid a whole bunch of money. As a reporter, it's a lot easier to poke fun and have fun with people who are making millions of dollars—and this is what they're being paid to withstand—so it doesn't feel as personal as when college kids start losing that badly.

"Jim Garrett [the head coach until 1985] is famous for saying the players were 'drug-addicted losers,' meaning they were addicted to losing, but it didn't come out that way."

Reporter: Lynn Henning, *Detroit News*

Team: 2003 Detroit Tigers

Mark of Atrocity: 43-119 record, the sixth-worst winning percentage of any MLB team since 1900

"Everybody knew they were going to be awful. This became one step in them attempting to bottom out, rebuild, and revive, and so I didn't find it to be a horribly uncomfortable time at all. The front office can be a little more receptive to your overtures as a reporter if [the team is] bad. They're not going to hold you accountable for their frustrations because everybody from the owner down knows the circumstances."

Flood-gates

BY DAVID UBERTI

In August 1973, a year after the break-in that ignited the Watergate scandal, *National Lampoon* deadpanned a faux Soviet conspiracy that saw officials "removing bugs from telephones, mixing actual letters and telegrams from Soviet citizens in with the usual phony ones, telling the truth to foreign newsmen," and refusing to lie at their own trials. Dubbed Volgagate, it was the first post-Watergate use of the suffix to describe wrongdoing—albeit of the fictitious variety. The label has since become a boon for headline writers, an instant connotation of scandal to readers, and, more recently, an ingredient for Twitter hashtag glory.

Social media users are quick to slap the four-letter distinction on questionable situations—journalists are not the gate-keepers they once were—and critics have seemingly accelerated their calls to lay the suffix to rest. CJR last ran a matrix evaluating such episodes in 2008. Since then, dozens more have sprouted in various media, many of them becoming national lampoons in their own right.

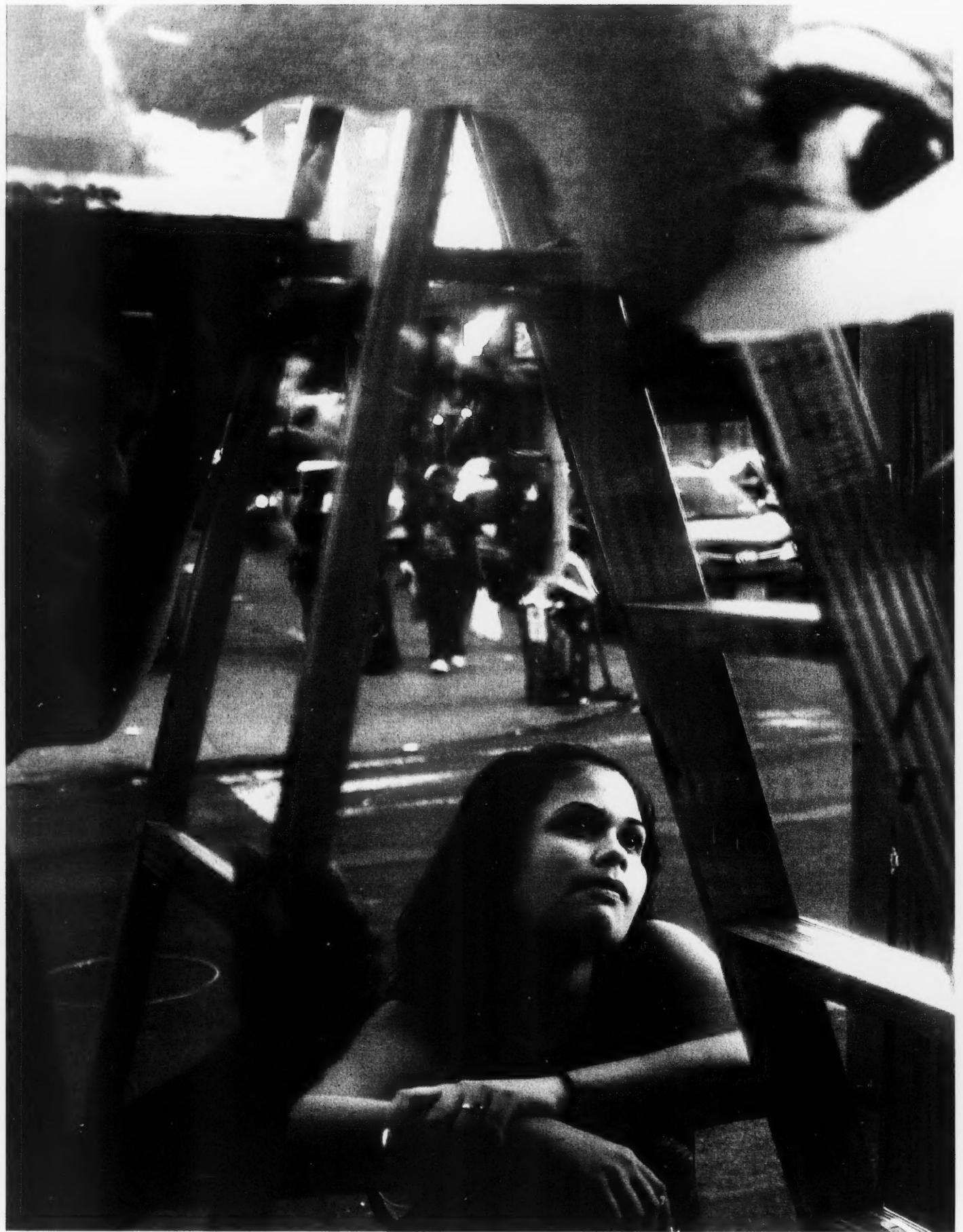
Reporter: George Vecsey, Newsday

Team: 1962 New York Mets

Mark of Atrocity: 40-120 record, the third-worst winning percentage of any MLB team since 1900

"What made the Mets different was [Hall of Fame manager] Casey Stengel. He was 72 years old in 1962. He wasn't going to take bullshit from anybody. Casey would say things about umpires like, 'They fuck us because we're horseshit.' If Casey thought his team was horseshit, how could you not go along with that? If Casey could have fun with it, you could have fun with it, too. [And] the Mets did stupid things. You came to expect that, and you were able to write with a sense of humor."¹⁹

—Christopher Massie



On the corner

BY DAVID UBERTI

Osaretin Ugiagbe shoots from the hip. The Nigerian-born photographer holds a camera near his waist as he navigates 149th Street in the South Bronx, snapping photos of unknowing passersby mid-sentence, mid-purchase, mid-chew. Crowds on the snow-coated corridor thicken as they approach The Hub—a nickname for this part of the neighborhood, which pulses with nail salons, Latin American restaurants, and mobile phone stores. Pedestrians grab onto one another for support as they tiptoe through the lakes of slush and slop at each intersection. Ugiagbe is at once among them but also not; his leisurely gait disguises quick flicks of his wrists and clicks of his camera.

The underlying hypothesis behind Ugiagbe's style is that capturing candid slices of life would be impossible should he shoot through a viewfinder. His work is more a product of improvisation, as he typically skirts traditional stories with a beginning, middle, and end in favor of whomever or whatever he comes across during walks on his lunch break from administrative work at Lincoln Medical Center. Nearly every day around noon, that's where you'll find him.

"This is life—this is my life, in a sense," says the 28-year-old, who began taking photographs in 2011. A portion of his three-year project, *South Bronx Special*, was featured in a borough-themed exhibit at the Bronx Documentary Center in September and October. "I'm here, I'm there, and I witnessed this. You're here with me. You saw this with me. This is it."

His father immigrated to the New York neighborhood in 1996, and Ugiagbe followed six years later with his mother and four sisters. For decades, the area has displayed chronic symptoms of the American urban crisis: racial segregation, rampant poverty, and slash-and-burn renewal efforts. Ugiagbe spent his teenage years wanting to get out—indeed, he now lives in another part of the borough. Yet he has found himself continually drawn back to the neighborhood, first for community college and now to work.

Neighborhood residents have long worried that gentrification could bring transient newcomers and rising rents to their streets, though such fears have yet to fully materialize as they have elsewhere in the city. Ugiagbe, for his part, wants to record life there—right now—regardless of what happens next.

Nevertheless, the shadow of change in the South Bronx holds the potential to disturb the photographer's sense of self. After all, the neighborhood is Ugiagbe's corner of the city—his corner of America. The purpose of his work isn't so much to illustrate an evolving New York, but to portray *his* New York. "Because after all," Ugiagbe says, "there's always this self-consciousness about being someone else, especially if you're from somewhere else." **CJR**

DAVID UBERTI is a Delacorte Fellow at CJR.



The fight of its life

The *Tampa Bay Times* is a singular newspaper.
Is that an asset—or a burden?

BY T.R. GOLDMAN

They are barely noticeable on the cream-colored wall of the seventh floor executive suite at the *Tampa Bay Times*: nine simple wood-framed announcements signed by the president of Columbia University and one emblem, lined up in two modest rows—Pulitzer Prizes, the brass rings of journalism. The newspaper, still widely known outside Florida as the *St. Petersburg Times*, its name until a 2012 rebranding, has scooped up four of those 10 Pulitzers in the past six years, and been a finalist five more times in that span. ¶ The *Times* is a venerable newspaper with an ownership structure that guarantees

its independence, a liberal voice on Florida's conservative west coast, a writer's paper where great reporters both stayed and made careers or left and jumped directly to the top of the journalistic pecking order. If Pulitzers are the measure, it is enjoying the most accomplished run in its history. And it achieved all this from a hometown best known for old folks, shuffleboard, and sunshine.

But the *Times*, Florida's largest newspaper, has been in financial free fall for those same six years. From a peak of 406 full-time news personnel in 2006, it now has half that. Across all divisions, about 200 full-time employees left last year alone. Regional sections now appear once a week, not every day; pay cuts have been instituted, retiree health benefits were eliminated, and severance pay has shriveled. And it is still fighting what may be the longest ongoing newspaper battle in the country, a nearly three-decade war of attrition with *The Tampa Tribune* that it literally cannot afford to lose.

In the past 18 months the descent has been particularly steep: two sets of buyouts and layoffs; another 5 percent pay

cut; a \$28 million short-term, high-interest loan, borrowed partly to pay back an earlier bank loan; the sale of a second employee parking lot, no longer much needed; and, in what seemed an inevitable culmination, the January announcement that it would sell its flagship headquarters, driven in part by the need to pay off the short-term loan, which is due by the end of next year.

"If this long, difficult stretch has tested your commitment to the *Times* or the newspaper business, this is a good time to consider your options," the paper's CEO, Paul Tash, wrote in a September 2014 memo to staff announcing the latest buyouts.

Those words raised the specter that the *Times'* days as a major publication were numbered—and not just among the paper's employees. "Editors around the country began calling," recalls Bill Duryea, a former senior editor at the *Times* who left in December to become enterprise editor at Politico. "It was a fire sale." By year's end, at least half a dozen of the paper's most lauded reporters and editors had decamped for *The Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and Politico.

In one sense, this tale is unremarkable. The internet and the Great Recession wreaked havoc on an entire industry. If the *Times*' has fallen harder, it is because it started at such a lofty height.

But the *Times* is a singular journalistic institution—a paper that has long stood out for its culture, its independence, and a sense of its own history as much as for the quality of its work. Its unique structure has given the paper's leaders extraordinary latitude to chart a path through the crisis, and they placed a bet that the *Times* could survive, even prosper, without radically remaking itself. Maintaining the paper's tradition of high-impact prestige journalism remained at the forefront; so did the largely print-based rivalry with the *Tribune*, across the bay. Meanwhile, the paper was by many accounts slower to turn its focus to the internet as a place where it must compete for readers' attention and, ultimately, generate revenue.

That approach means that, if the *Times* can at last find a way to achieve financial stability and accelerate its digital transition, it may yet come through the current crisis with its editorial identity intact. The paper's leadership believes the outlook is brighter than it has been in years. Recent departures provided between 10 and 20 percent more in newsroom salary savings than had been anticipated—"room under the cap," says Neil Brown, the editor and vice president. Tash says he is "bullish" on 2015, and the paper is hiring again—in part to fill some key positions lost in the buyouts—and still producing prize-winning journalism.

But senior management has been optimistic before. "I will say that each of the last two to three years, we thought we'd turned the corner," concedes Brown. Now, he says, "Our analysis is that the cuts we made can be reconciled with the revenues we expect in 2015. And we're more clear-eyed about them today than we might have been about them two years ago."

IT WASN'T SUPPOSED TO BE THIS HARD. A LITTLE LESS THAN a decade ago, as it had become apparent that running a newspaper was no longer a license to print money, a string of profiles in other publications—*Forbes*, the *Financial Times*, *The New York Times*—looked to St. Petersburg and asked whether it might offer salvation. The *Times* was expected to turn a profit, but its owner was the nonprofit Poynter Institute, not a publicly traded company with rapacious shareholders demanding ever-higher margins. Poynter and the *Times* are connected by a tightly knit, even overlapping corporate structure. Directors of the Times Publishing Company—the entity that directly owns the *Times*, the website *Tampabay.com*, and a few affiliated publications—are nominated by the paper's CEO, who is also the board chairman, and all the regular directors are employed by the *Times* or Poynter. The CEO is also the board chairman at Poynter. The paper, in effect, owns itself.

That structure, which stems from former owner Nelson Poynter's vision of newspaper ownership as a "sacred trust," has protected the paper's status as a journalist-centered enterprise: Tash, like his predecessors, spent his career in the newsroom. The setup freed the *Times* to reinvest in itself when times were good, and initially to make smaller cuts than much of the industry when times turned bad—even, beginning in 2011, foregoing its annual dividend payment of

millions of dollars to the Poynter Institute, which is facing its own financial struggles.

The paper had strategic reasons, too, to avoid the wholesale cuts most chain newspapers made as industry-wide revenues plunged sharply. The *Times* was fixated on building market share across Tampa Bay, and eventually putting *The Tampa Tribune* out of business—an approach that depended in part on keeping quality high. But, while the *Times* has made headway, the *Tribune* is still there, taking a critical share of the advertising market with it. And having chosen to cut more slowly than other publications, the paper has had to keep chasing revenue declines.

The *Times'* balance sheet is closely guarded—at a company forum last year, staff were shown separate bar graphs without percentages or numbers comparing year-to-year revenues and costs—but the loss of revenue is reflected in the Poynter Institute's 990 tax returns. In 2010, income for the Times Holding Company, corporate parent of the publishing company, was \$159 million. By 2013, the figure was \$140 million. In 2014, the company is expected to post revenues of roughly \$130 million, with the bulk of that from newspaper operations. That trend is roughly consistent with revenue declines at metro papers more broadly, pegged at 4 to 7 percent annually by analyst Ken Doctor, though the Times Holding Company also saw its assets decrease from \$83 million to \$65 million between 2010 and 2013. (The only other public information is the salaries of senior executives. Tash's total compensation in 2013 was \$516,040; he notes he is now making 85 percent of what he was earning when he started the job in 2004, and, he says, "I'm not bitching about my pay.")

That challenging period has revealed some downsides to the *Times'* vaunted independence. At the most basic level, the paper enjoys few economies of scale; it cannot consolidate back office functions as chain papers increasingly have, in search of savings. Everything from customer service to advertising to finance, production costs, and IT is handled in-house. Independence can also be isolation: There are no corporate cousins with whom the *Times'* leaders can share financial metrics.

The deeper questions, though, are about whether the *Times'* unique structure is well-matched to the scale of the challenges it faces.

"Are journalists good businessmen? I think that's a fair enough question to ask," says Neville Green, who joined the paper in 1981, now edits the tabloid *tbt**, and sits on the board of the Times Publishing Company. "The CEO of the paper has been the editor of the paper. That allows for dynamic leadership. But it does mean the structure is very much looking up to the Pope, and that can lead to people waiting for that Pope to make decisions that in a more corporate kind of structure are not so much centered on one person."

A staffer who left the newspaper last year and is now at another publication makes a harsher point: "We were told, 'You see what's happening at Knight Ridder, we're not going to have shareholders tell us what to do.'" The former staffer continues: "Yeah, shareholders can be bad, but accountability can be good, too. If this were a publicly held company, the second year the CEO doesn't turn a profit, he'd be gone."

Confronted with these critiques, Tash bristles. Decision-making has become far more collaborative than it was a few decades ago, he says, and it is condescending to assume a journalist cannot run a news operation.

"If you think I should have been fired, then yes, our system does not achieve that result so easily," he adds. "On the other hand, it provides for great and sustained continuity and effort over a period of time."

THE TIMES HAS LONG BEEN AN INNOVATOR. NELSON POYNTER, who ran the paper for four decades until his death in 1978, was one of the earliest users of color and graphics. The paper was one of the first to establish zoned editions, spending heavily to move up Florida's west coast in the 1970s and '80s and open fully staffed bureaus, including ad sales people, as far as 100 miles away. More recently, it created PolitiFact.com, the factchecking operation that won a national reporting Pulitzer in 2009 and has become a well-known digital franchise licensed by other publications. The free tabloid, *tbt**, launched in 2004 to reach younger readers, boasts an impressive pickup rate and a Friday press run that tops 100,000, and it is profitable. The paper has adopted new tactics as it retrenches, too: A Tallahassee newsroom operated jointly with the *Miami Herald* since 2008 provides solid statehouse coverage; a successful Kickstarter campaign covered the cost of PolitiFact's live factchecking for the 2015 State of the Union.

But the *Times* has often been slow to adjust to the Web, perhaps the biggest innovation of all.

Tom Scherberger, the director of media and public relations at Eckerd College, ran the paper's Now! Desk for breaking news from 2008 to 2012. He remembers having difficulty convincing colleagues to post breaking stories online. "People wanted to break stories in print, because scoops would sell the paper," he recalls. "Why put something on the Web if nobody else has it?" people would say." (Brown eventually "laid down the law" about breaking news online, he says.) The Web was an afterthought in other ways, too. About four or five years ago, Tash says, "we very purposely asked ourselves: If we are one of the 10 best newspapers in America ... then why don't we have one of America's 10 best Web experiences?" He adds, "It was the first time I framed the question to myself that way."

The *Times* remains among the diminishing set of newsrooms where reporters are not judged at least partially by the number of pageviews their stories attract. That has made it easier for the paper to stay consistent in its editorial priorities—and to refuse to "do violence" to its brand, as Brown puts it. But there are tradeoffs.

"Only in the last eight months have I actually heard someone start to say: 'Wow, that tanked online,' a recognition of the importance of metrics and that they really don't have unlimited resources," says Wayne Garcia, the associate director of the school of mass communications at the University of

South Florida, who worked for both *The Tampa Tribune* and the then-St. Petersburg Times and maintains ties to current and former reporters. "All this work into one of those beautiful narrative website features—and nobody came."

For ambitious journalists who were attuned to Web analytics, meanwhile, modest online readership could be discouraging. Five thousand hits was considered a good number for a story read by a local Tampa Bay audience. "These are like end-of-the-world numbers, especially for a young person who understood Web traffic at other places," says a former staffer who now works at another media company.

Today, the paper's leadership is proud of the "reimagined" website, featuring responsive design, that launched in 2013, and the *Times*, like any news outlet, has embraced strategies to spread its stories online. Reporters are encouraged to write Web-friendly headlines and develop social media followings. Web specialists promote content, and Web producer vacancies are being filled. "We've come a long way, and we need to go a lot further," says John Schlander, the digital

'Are journalists good businessmen? I think that's a fair enough question to ask.'

general manager, who notes that search engine and social referrals to Tampabay.com each rose more than 20 percent in 2014, and that video on the site is "growing like crazy," with about 725,000 views in January.

By other metrics, the digital audience looks less strong. The *Times* averaged about 3.5 million unique visitors from all devices to its website through the second half of 2014, jumping to 4.5 million in January. The Minneapolis *Star Tribune*, which serves a metro area of roughly similar size and has a comparable print circulation and a digital paywall, draws 5.5 million monthly uniques to its desktop site; mobile Web and app traffic bring that to about 8 million. *The Denver Post*, another comparable publication, was at 6.6 million monthly uniques for all digital traffic in late 2014, rising to 7.1 million in January.

Of course, the demographics of every market are different. The *Times* isn't directly competing with those publications, and as Schlander points out, *The Tampa Tribune* has about half the *Times'* unique visitors. It is also not obvious that more Web audience alone would have made much difference to the bottom line—as the industry has learned, raw traffic can be difficult to monetize. Still, the paper lags many of its peers in developing digital dollars. Digital subscriptions and ads account for between 5 and 10 percent of revenues, according to Tash. Industry-wide, total digital revenue—ads, circulation, and other sources like marketing services—accounted for about 12 percent of total revenue in 2013, according to the Newspaper Association of America.

The *Times* figure, says Tampabay.com publisher Joe DeLuca, "is on the low side, but not dramatically below, and that's a good thing, because that means there's opportunity there."

With digital readers increasingly moving to mobile devices, the paper is just now preparing to launch what Brown calls a "bona fide app you get from the app store." A soft paywall was put in place in the fall of 2013; the paper has netted about 4,500 digital subscribers so far. This spring, the *Times* plans to introduce bundled print and Web subscriptions—a fairly basic feature that has been "a technical obstacle for us to date," Tash says.

"I wish we were farther along than we are right now," he acknowledges. But, in his mind, the collapse of print advertising looms much larger than any missteps in the digital transition—if there were missteps. "I'm not sure that means we were slow," he continues, "and I'm not sure ultimately that that difference in pace accounts for much of the strain we're seeing now."

ONE POINT OF CONTENTION WITHIN THE NEWSROOM IS the sense that management has not been forthright about the scope of the paper's problems. "If there's a complaint I hear," says Garcia, "it's why have we been told, 'With a trim here, a trim there, we can make it?' That's caused a lot of frustration."

In part, that's because *Times* executives believed—justifiably or not—that the recession would end sooner than it did. And because by cutting but not slashing, they could continue their push across the bay and be that much stronger once things picked up again and their nemesis, *The Tampa Tribune*, was gone. The rivalry with the 120-year-old *Tribune* has animated many of the *Times'* business decisions since 1987, the year the *Times* invaded neighboring Hillsborough County. That strategy accounts for the 2012 name change (an earlier effort in the mid-2000s was blocked by a *Tribune* lawsuit) and a \$30 million stadium naming-rights deal, struck in 2002, that cost the paper \$2.5 million a year.

For the *Times*, the *Tribune*'s demise has long since ceased to be a simple point of honor. "I'm not sure there is enough revenue to support two organizations of the size and scale of these two," says Tash. And any revenue pickup from the *Tribune*'s decline is almost pure profit, he adds, since "we already have the basic cost of serving the market covered."

That focus on the *Tribune* may miss a bigger point: "The competition that the paper has to vanquish is not the *Tribune*," notes an observer who has closely followed the paper's financial travails. "The real competition is [for] people's attention, people's time, and interest. That's a much more complicated problem than *The Tampa Tribune*."

In any case, the *Tribune* has refused to die—though the *Times* has made gains. When the stadium deal was canceled in 2014, Tash noted that the paper had achieved its goals: *Times* daily readership has grown more than 40 percent in Tampa's Hillsborough County and is now about equal to the *Tribune*'s. Leading the charge is the former top advertising executive at the *Tribune*, Bruce Faulmann, whom Tash helped lure to the Times Publishing Company in 2008.

Indeed, just under three years ago, it looked like a full victory was in hand. The *Tribune*'s owner, Media General,

had put its entire portfolio of more than 60 print outlets on the market, and Warren Buffett paid \$142 million in cash to acquire every one—except the *Tribune* and its associated publications. When the news broke, recalled the former staffer now working at another media company, "the *Times* upper management was giddy." But the *Tribune* survived, snatched up five months later by a Los Angeles-based private equity firm, Revolution Capital, at the rock-bottom price of \$9.5 million. The company continues to publish the paper with a greatly reduced staff, including a Pinellas County edition called *The St. Petersburg Tribune*.

"What are they up to?" says Tash. "I can't tell. I just don't know what they are doing." *Tribune* publisher Brian Burns did not return two messages seeking comment.

THE TIMES IS, IN MANY WAYS, A DIMINISHED VERSION OF itself. But, in a period when some metro papers are struggling through fitful reinventions, it is still recognizably itself, and its journalistic ambitions remain high.

A two-part narrative feature in late 2014 took stock of a dramatic forensic investigation on the grounds of the Dozier School for Boys; richly illustrated and spiced with multimedia, it earned praise from journalists around the country. The paper still maintains separate investigations and enterprise teams, and earlier this year, it brought on *Newsday*'s Adam Playford, who helped that paper become a finalist in last year's public service Pulitzer contest, to lead a new data team. The *Times* has at least three major investigations in the works for 2015; the investigative team is run by Chris Davis, who helped lead the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* to its first Pulitzer in 2011. Reporter Alexandra Zayas, a 2013 Pulitzer finalist, says the chance to work for Davis is a big reason she is staying at the *Times*, "despite opportunities to work for some of the most exciting newsrooms in the country, both legacy and digital."

"If the *Tribune* goes out of business in the next year or two, and the *Times* figures out this digital thing, and gets all the national advertising for this market, Tash may turn out to be a genius," says Rob Hooker, the paper's unofficial historian and former deputy managing editor, who was laid off in 2011 after 40 years at the paper.

Those are big ifs—and more than management's reputation hangs in the balance. One of those Pulitzers, bestowed last year, was for a seven-part series exposing the misdeeds of a prominent slumlord who was also a major Republican fundraiser. Another, a year earlier, was for a series of 10 editorials that helped reverse a decision to end fluoridation of the local water supply. "It's not just about what [that journalism] did for us," says Tash. Rather, it is "about the difference that work made in Tampa Bay."

"What's the point of a newspaper continuing if we can't do that kind of work?" he adds, his voice rising. "What's the point?" CJR

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Bad medicine

Free lunches, paid speaking gigs, and free drug samples often aren't disclosed by TV doctors

BY PAUL D. THACKER

Last September, the federal government rolled out a website that offered a searchable database of the \$3.5 billion in payments that drug and device companies provided to physicians and teaching hospitals in the last half of 2013. ¶ Data for 2014 is still being accumulated, but the breadth of information already compiled has given unprecedented insight into a medical economy that dispenses money into the hands of thousands of doctors who turn around and dispense medical advice to patients. Since this website went live, reporters from across the country have been

combing through the data, producing dozens of stories about physicians with lucrative arrangements. But it appears that the reporters have not yet taken a look at how this database, which the government calls Open Payments, may uncover conflicts of interest in the field of journalism as well—conflicts that should prompt the profession to tighten up its own disclosure policies.

A review of the database finds physician journalists—those who appear regularly on Fox News, ABC News, and CBS News—are offering medical advice without disclosing that they are receiving money from the pharmaceutical industry, which could benefit from the doctors' on-air recommendations. For example, companies have provided free lunches to Jonathan LaPook, the chief medical correspondent for the CBS Evening News with Scott Pelley and professor of medicine at NYU.

While this may not seem important, studies published in the medical literature have found that even small gifts like lunches can alter prescribing behavior. This is why many medical schools have moved to ban free meals and why one company was found to have spent \$36 million one year on free lunches for doctors as part of a campaign to increase sales of a drug. Pharmaceutical companies have also paid for lunches and travel for Dr. Jennifer Ashton, ABC News' senior medical contributor, who appears on *Good Morning America*. On top of free food, Forest Laboratories has paid Dr. Keith Ablow, a member of the Fox News Medical A-Team, \$3,850 in speaking fees.

These fringe benefits violate ethical standards of most all newsrooms, imposed to ensure audiences that their reporters have no conflicts that could discredit their work. The code of ethics for the Society of Professional Journalists states that reporters should refuse "gifts, favors, fees, free travel and special treatment, and avoid political and other outside activities that may compromise integrity or impartiality, or may damage credibility." But it has been a practice for some time for companies to provide free lunches to doctors in order to buy influence.

"My policy is not to accept gifts—either as a journalist or physician," wrote CBS correspondent Dr. LaPook in an email response to questions. He said that the free lunches were arranged by his hospital's department. However, protocols were later tightened and drug representatives are no longer allowed to buy lunches. CBS News did not disclose its policy to CJR, but says it now considers this matter closed.

When asked about payments to her, Dr. Ashton responded by email, "My ethical standards are to do the right thing for my patients, and for the issues that I consider to be medically sound and valid." She said she sometimes receives an honorarium for speaking at events but that she has turned down product endorsements. The payment for travel that appears in the database was made by Bristol Myers Squibb so she could give a speech at the request of ABC News. "I expect that my travel be covered if I am taking

'Viewers deserve to know whether an expert is being paid by a company, even if the link between the company and what they are saying isn't clear.'

time away from seeing patients and earning income in my medical office."

Dr. Adriane Fugh Berman is an associate professor of family medicine at Georgetown University who runs Pharmed Out, a nonprofit that studies industry-physician relationships. She said she finds it troubling that Dr. Ashton says that she does not probe the doctors who appear on her show to identify potential conflicts. "Viewers deserve to know whether an expert is being paid by a company, even if the link between the company and what they are saying isn't clear," she said. Getting a company's point of view on television is worth millions in free advertising, Ashton said.

Dr. Ablow did not respond to repeated requests for comment, but he has also spoken out against industry influence on the practice of medicine. In 2011, he resigned from the American Psychiatric Association and later went on Fox, where at one point he questioned the APA's ethical credibility. "[T]he APA has a history of getting into bed with the pharmaceutical companies," he said, later adding, "this is what's wrong with American healthcare."

Perhaps no other physician in the media is more aware of the sensitivity of these relationships than Dr. Scott Gottlieb, a resident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, columnist at *Forbes*, and frequent contributor to *The Wall Street Journal* and *Politico*. Ten years ago, Dr. Gottlieb came under heavy scrutiny for his ties to industry and Wall Street by *The Seattle Times* and *The Boston Globe* when he was chosen by the Bush administration for the number two job at the FDA.

In a May column for *Forbes*, Dr. Gottlieb blamed new federal disclosure rules on "past marketing excesses of the drug and device makers" and the inability of physicians to regulate their own behavior. Perhaps because he has received such intense scrutiny in the past, he says now that he remains vigilant in disclosing his outside consulting when writing for news outlets, and he personally oversees his bio at *Forbes* to ensure it remains complete and up to date.

But he also says the government's new website is incomplete and difficult to navigate. For instance, the site only lists Dr. Gottlieb's consulting with Vertex Pharmaceuticals, but he said he also consults for GlaxoSmithKline, a venture capital fund, and Avalere Health, a firm that advises healthcare companies. Dr. Gottlieb is not alone in his complaints. The government has admitted that the Open Payments site has been dogged by problems and as much as one third of the payments reported to the government were not included in the database due to data inconsistencies. This means further revelations could come to light as the government improves the database.

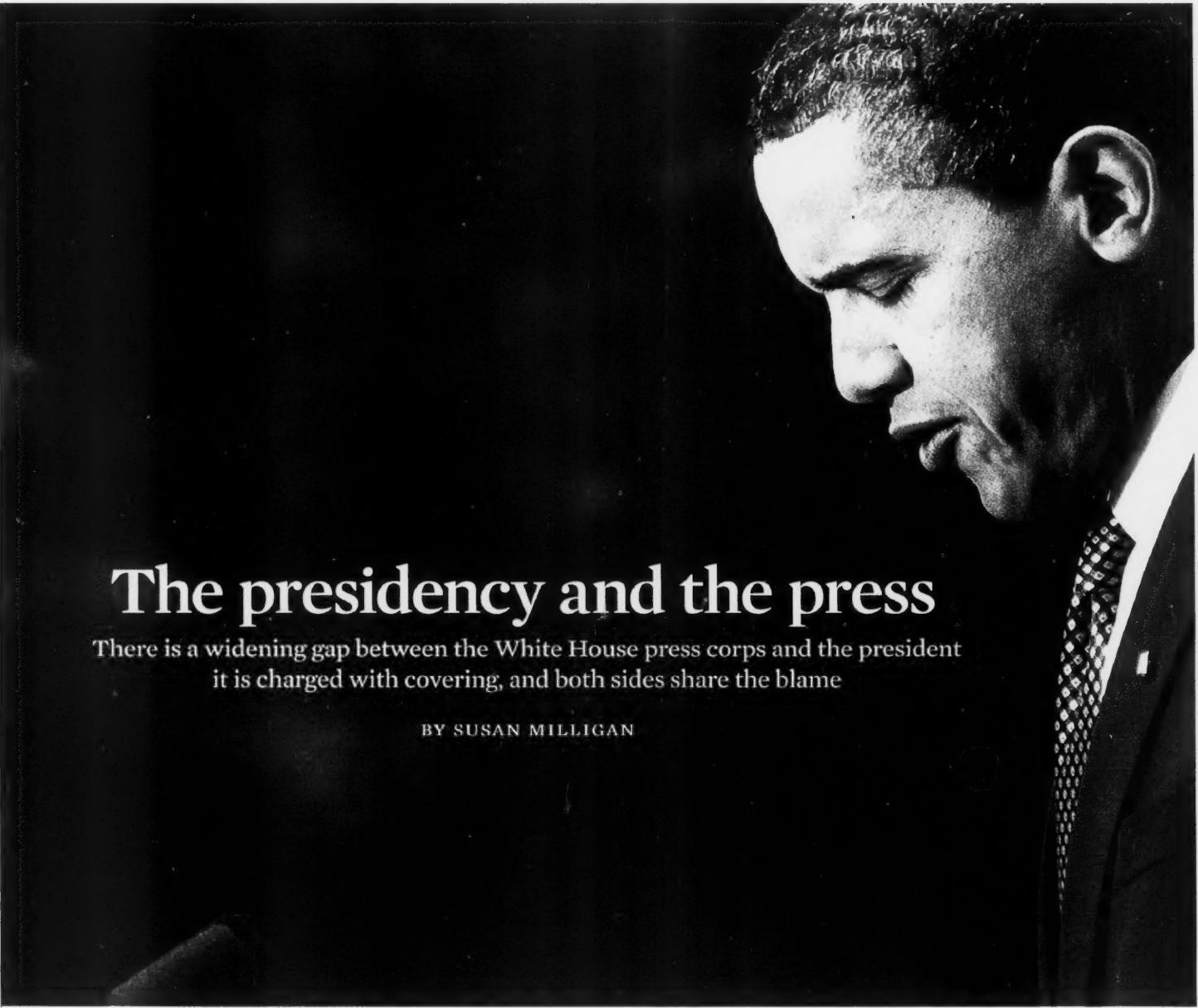
Financial ties between medical companies and physicians in the media will likely continue to draw greater scrutiny as updates are made to Open Payments, a site that resulted from an Affordable Care Act requirement that the medical community report financial transactions.

Last year, the editorial board of *USA Today* praised the Open Payments site, noting that the free lunches, paid speaking gigs, and free drug samples have begun to look like "legalized bribery."

In an opposing view also run by *USA Today*, Dr. Thomas Stossel of Harvard Medical School called the new website "a cheap, shortsighted public relations exercise." Dr. Stossel has been a longtime critic of such disclosure, and the op-ed did not note that he is the scientific founder and director of BioAegis Therapeutics, as well as a director of Velico Medical Corporation.

"Our practice is to disclose, and we would have shared information about Dr. Stossel's ties if we had known," said Brent Jones, standards and ethics editor at *USA Today*. "We should have asked, but we didn't." **CJR**

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The presidency and the press

There is a widening gap between the White House press corps and the president it is charged with covering, and both sides share the blame

BY SUSAN MILLIGAN

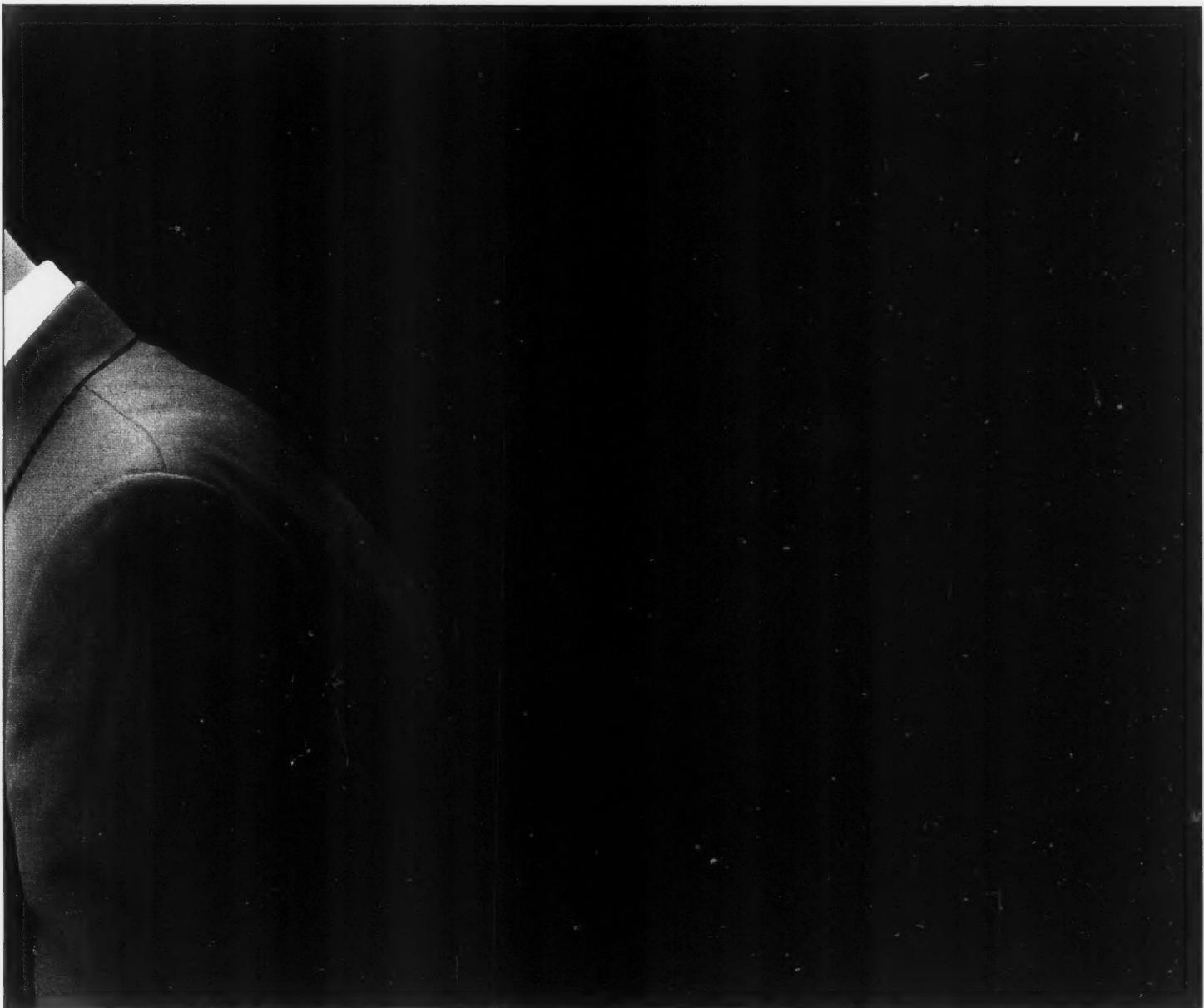
The day after the 2014 midterm elections was not a time of celebration for the losing Democrats, and the White House press corps was determined to get the party's most senior member on the record about what was surely a disappointing night for the president. Ten reporters were given the chance to ask questions during the 74-minute press conference, and seven of them asked the president some version of this question: Was it your own fault, and how will you change your behavior and agenda? To each question, President Obama was equally determined not to

take the bait, frustrating a White House press corps unable to evoke a note of regret, anger, or introspection from a man who had just learned he would spend the final two years of his presidency tangling with a GOP-run Congress.

Julie Pace of The Associated Press tried first. "You said during this election that while your name wasn't on the ballot, your policies were. And despite the optimism that you're expressing here, last night was a devastating night for your party. Given that, do you feel any responsibility to recalibrate

your agenda for the next two years? And what changes do you need to make in your White House and in your dealings with Republicans in order to address the concerns that voters expressed with your administration?"

The president repeated much of the upbeat tone of his opening statement. "The American people overwhelmingly believe that this town doesn't work well and that it is not attentive to their needs. And as president, they, rightly, hold me accountable to do more to make it work properly." Obama



said. "I'm the guy who's elected by everybody, not just from a particular state or a particular district. And they want me to push hard to close some of these divisions, break through some of the gridlock, and get stuff done. So the most important things I can do is just get stuff done, and help Congress get some things done," he added, then went on for what would be a six-minute answer to Pace's question and follow-up.

Perhaps a more provocatively put question might get a more direct answer? Jeff Mason of Reuters gave it a shot, reminding Obama that he had labeled the 2010 midterms a "shellacking," and asking what the 2014 elections should be called. Obama demurred, calling it "a good night" for Republicans. Ed Henry of Fox News asked Obama why he was "doubling down" on his approach to Congress, and followed with a poke-the-bear question about whether there was something about Obama's leadership that was the problem. Obama, in another lengthy answer, responded that he hoped Republicans would work with him. Major Garrett, correspondent for

CBS News and *National Journal*, tried a two-pronged approach to squeeze some news out of the president, either on the elections or the rumored executive order on immigration policy. Were the elections a referendum on Obama's intentions to use his executive power to change immigration rules unilaterally?

Obama was unfazed. "I don't want to try to read the tea leaves on election results. What I am going to try to do as president is to make sure that I'm advancing what I think is best for the country," the president responded, not signaling that his executive order on immigration would come just over two weeks later.

THE PRESS CONFERENCE, JUST THE FOURTH FORMAL, SOLO question-and-answer exchange Obama had held in the White House in 2014, has come to define the current state of White House reporting, one in which there is a gulf between the press and the head of state it's charged with covering. The answers are long, leaving time for just a few questions from

a press corps with already-limited access to the president. Actual news is almost never made, since the White House has new tools allowing it to release and manage news on its own schedule and terms—its online news report is but one of these.

The press, meanwhile, shows itself to be a willing hostage to the modern demands for a click-worthy story and a tweetable quote. At press conferences, the overwhelming tendency is to ask about the day's headline or to look for the "gotcha" question, instead of addressing long-term accountability issues. Frequently, one journalist after the next will ask the same question, as they did during the post-election news conference. Reporters ask questions not to get information, but to get a reaction. And even with that strategy, they rarely succeed.

An exhaustive study of every official exchange Obama had with the press corps in 2014, supplemented by a review of daily press briefings and interviews with more than a dozen current and former correspondents and White House press secretaries, reveals a White House determined to conceal its

accomplish what they see as their central mission: to explain why the president does what he does. "The people who cover the president know him the least," said Peter Baker, a White House correspondent for *The New York Times*. "People ask me all the time, 'What's he like?' As if I knew." Despite having covered Obama for the entirety of his presidency, Baker said, "I don't know what makes the man tick."

The result is a sheaf of White House reporting, including tough analysis of White House policy and decisions, that relies on outside sources but conveys very little insight into how those decisions were made. Journalists diligently vet legislative proposals, reporting GOP opposition or the potential impact on various industries or constituencies. They note when the president says or does something that appears at odds with what he said or did at an earlier time. White House reporters who are part of a team and have time do go deeper, trying to get information by grilling Congress, agency officials and outsiders who are in contact with the

White House. *The New York Times'* Baker and his colleague, national security writer Eric Schmitt, used that strategy to pen an incisive story last September on how the administration underestimated the threat from the Islamic State.

But such efforts are scarce, and increasingly reliant on beat reporters who cover other sectors of government, not the White House. "Something really important

has gone missing, understanding the president and having both sides trust each other enough so [the press] understands what's going on. We don't understand him as well as we should," said *US News & World Report* writer Kenneth Walsh, who has covered the White House since 1986. "And I think the country loses because of that."

There has always been a certain tension between the White House and the press corps that covers it, and that is natural and healthy, press secretaries and reporters say. But the conditions can breed frustration; journalists, for example, for many years have been barred from walking around all but limited areas unless they are chaperoned by staff. Presidents have long tried to get around the press when it suits them. But the dynamics have changed dramatically with the current president, especially with the escalation of technology, social media, and an increasingly sophisticated ability to identify and reach niche audiences. Previous presidents have held a town hall meeting or given an exclusive to a specialty publication to get a message out or announce a new policy to a friendly audience. The Obama White House has done this, too, and taken it a step further, becoming the first to have its own in-house video reporting operation, which produces "West Wing Week," a Friday show viewable on the White House's website. That enables the administration to bypass the press corps completely, if it chooses.

The relationship between the president and the press is more distant than it has been in a half century.

workings from the press, and by extension, the public. The research, paid for by a fund established in memory of former White House correspondent Helen Thomas, makes clear that the media most responsible for covering the president and his inner sanctum are given little insight into how decisions are made or who influences those decisions, whether from inside or outside the White House.

Evidence suggests that the relationship between the president and the press is more distant than it has been in a half century. John F. Kennedy held frequent press conferences—23 a year, according to Martha Joynt Kumar, a presidency and media scholar—and also had an ongoing relationship with Ben Bradlee, then *Newsweek*'s Washington bureau chief. Jimmy Carter would play softball with the press corps. Bill Clinton attended an off-the-record dinner with African-American reporters at the home of then-*Newsday* White House correspondent William Douglas. By 2014, White House reporters' ability to question the president was largely limited to the 44 exchanges Obama had with the media, just five of them in solo press conferences.

The troubling irony, White House reporters say, is that they are working in what is arguably the freest press in the world, in an era of easily delivered information, and in a nation where an aggressive and unfettered media is considered essential to democracy. Yet they find it nearly impossible to

"They're trying to get their message out all by themselves and they don't feel, correctly or incorrectly, that they need to rely on the White House press corps anymore," said *Washington Post* columnist Dana Milbank, who covered the George W. Bush administration.

In December, when the Obama administration wanted to let the world know about the president's decision to make Alaska's Bristol Bay off-limits to oil and gas leasing, it bypassed the White House press, announcing the move via a video of the president on the White House Facebook page. White House press secretary Josh Earnest defended the strategy, saying the matter was important to the environmental community and would have been largely ignored by the White House press corps if he'd offered it up at the daily briefing. Still, he allowed that it did "rankle some in the briefing room. They viewed it as carving out [a piece of] their traditional role of reporting breaking news." But by releasing it on the White House's Facebook site, Earnest said in an interview, "this got more attention and better play among the people who care about it the most." He has a point. The White House video announcement, which might well have been given short shrift by the national press corps, was greeted with thanks by online commenters.

THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA CANNOT BE OVERSTATED: It drives both the news and the tone of the questioning, and coverage has suffered. Earnest said he gave up on the morning "gaggles"—once-valuable, off-camera sessions in the press secretary's office where correspondents would ask a few questions and get a sense of the day's schedule—because reporters would just stand around tweeting everything Earnest said.

Part of it is about branding. Broadcast and now even print reporters are eagerly marketing not just their news organizations, but themselves, as the sweepstakes for digital audience intensifies. From editors back home, the pressure is on to "push the brand, push the brand," said Jim Carroll, who covers the White House for the *Louisville Courier-Journal*. The White House tries to get its message out on Twitter, blogs, and Facebook, but reporters, too, are pushed to brand themselves and collect legions of Twitter followers, Carroll said, adding that this is good for his newspaper and for reporters.

Would a reporter have asked the president to brand the 2014 elections, for example, without the lure of Twitter? Journalists say probably not. "It is the catchphrases, it's those little tweet-sized words and phrases by which we measure our presidents now," said former ABC correspondent Ann Compton, who recently retired after covering the White House for four decades. "It's not good. It's not healthy. It's not informative for the American people. But we sure do overdo it now. Our attention span is down to 140 characters."

Television, long an influencer of media behavior and White House strategy, has in recent years added a theatrical component not just to the prime-time presidential news conferences, but the daily press briefings. It's common, Compton said, for five or six network and cable TV reporters to ask virtually the same question, one after another. Absurd, perhaps, but the correspondents aren't just looking for an on-camera answer. They need themselves on camera, too, asking the tough questions. ("Too often, we sound like bad community

theater actors trying to sound like reporters," quipped Olivier Knox, chief Washington correspondent for Yahoo News and host of a weekly SiriusXM show on "POTUS" Channel 124). And when the dynamic becomes about performance, the substance of the briefings naturally ebbs, making the sessions less useful for getting actual information. Former Clinton press secretary Mike McCurry, who has offered a mea culpa for being the first to allow live TV coverage of the full press briefings, said the sessions took on an entertainment quality during the Monica Lewinsky scandal, when cable news executives told him viewership went way up during his briefings. "I think cable television got hooked on putting the briefings on television, and then everyone reverted to theatrical roles. Then, the serious reporters stopped going," McCurry said.

Some reporters do keep going, if for no other reason than to gather up a few White House talking points and get them on the record. "You do force them to take questions, and there's a benefit in that," said National Journal White House correspondent George Condon, who is working on a book on the White House Correspondents Association. "Does he answer every question the way we'd like? Of course not. But it does advance the story."

AN EXAMINATION OF TRANSCRIPTS, PRESS BRIEFINGS, AND the on-camera theater of the news conferences offers a telling view of the increasingly limited relationship between the president and the press. In the whole of 2014, according to veteran CBS News White House correspondent Mark Knoller, who keeps exhaustive records on presidential events, Obama's 44 exchanges with the press included five formal press conferences and 20 joint press conferences with foreign leaders; the remainder were short question-and-answer periods after the president made a statement. Not included in Knoller's tally are the one-on-one interviews Obama has with individual local and national reporters. Of the formal press conferences last year, few produced news (an exception was Obama's December response that Sony should not have canceled the North Korea-themed spoof *The Interview*).

As much as it can, the White House tries to control the pressers. While Ronald Reagan would respond to raised hands (sometimes tapping a reporter he knew would ask an offbeat question), Obama calls on reporters from a prepared list and is the first president, Condon maintains, to stick to that list religiously. It's not that the questions asked are frivolous—much of the 2014 agenda included queries on Russia sanctions, Ukraine, ISIL, immigration, and the president's relationship with Congress, but broader, longer-look issues get pushed aside by the daily pressures. A report from the US Conference of Mayors last year showed that homelessness is increasing in major US cities, but the president was not asked about it during a press availability last year. A UNICEF report last year showed that child poverty in the US is among the worst in the developed world, but Obama was not asked to answer for it. And even the torture report, released in early December, was stale, by modern news standards, when Obama held his next press conference on December 19. No one asked about the report, much to the bafflement of Robert Gibbs, Obama's first White House press secretary.

Gibbs said a good question for his former boss would have been, "How do you balance, Mr. President, your first act, of outlawing this [torture]" with "watching a 6,000-page report being issued during your administration, in which you held no one accountable" for the behavior. "And then just step back" and hear the president reflect on it, Gibbs said.

Politics often drives the direction of the questions. At an April 17 press conference, *La Opinión* Washington correspondent María Peña brought up immigration, but led her query with Obama's relationship with congressional Republicans. "I've got a hot spot for you here in the US. House Majority Leader Eric Cantor said—or claimed—that you haven't learned how to work with them. And he's angry that you're attacking the GOP on the lack of movement on immigration reform," Peña said, asking for a response. Obama said he had had a good conversation with Cantor, then reiterated his oft-said view that Republicans needed to get it done. "We know what the right thing to do is. It's a matter of political will. It's not any longer a matter of policy. And I'm going to continue to encourage them to get this done," the president said.

In the same presser, several questions were about the Affordable Care Act—largely focusing on its political fallout—with reporters asking whether Democrats should be more aggressive about promoting the law, and how long it would be a "political football." Responded Obama, "I don't know how long it's going to take. But in the meantime, how about us focusing on some things that the American people really care about?"

White House correspondents say the president is deft at running out the clock by "filibustering" with his answers. Reporters are obligated (the wires, in particular) to get the chief executive on record on whatever crisis or purported scandal is happening. "A plane's missing, and everybody zigs to that," Ed Henry of Fox said. "Sometimes we're zigging, when we should be zagging."

Gibbs said the press corps may still feel burned by the faulty intelligence ahead of the Iraq War, and now reporters worry that they might miss something. As a result, Gibbs said, they treat everything as "an inflection point. Everything is a huge disaster. Three days later, it's not something we're even talking about," Gibbs said. But it's not always easy to know what is a flash-in-the-pan story, and what is a developing crisis. Ebola, for example, Henry noted, "was a story that might have been hyped up too much, but a lot of our viewers were very concerned about it."

Not only are there limited formal sessions, reporters have fewer daily chances for a surprise visit. Obama rarely does a "pool spray"—when the press pool pops in at the top of a cabinet meeting or bilateral chat with a foreign leader, and gets the president to comment on the big news of the day. During previous administrations, such events used to happen several times a week. Now they are rare, and when they do happen, reporters don't get newsy responses—though not for lack of trying. A read-through of the 2014 exchanges shows Obama deflecting questions (often with a promise to announce something at a later date) and showing some jocular annoyance at the persistence of the press.

Before a January 14, 2014, cabinet meeting, Obama thanked the press for coming, spoke for about seven minutes, then

added, "with that, I'm going to kick you all out." Two questions about the National Security Agency were tossed out, to which Obama replied, "Actually, it's getting close. So I'll have quite a bit to say about that very soon."

At an August 6 press conference at the State Department, Bloomberg's Margaret Talev asked Obama if he would use the federal contracting process to discourage companies from moving overseas to avoid paying US taxes. "I'm not going to announce specifics in dribs and drabs," the president said. At a September 5 press conference in Wales, *The Wall Street Journal's* Colleen Nelson asked if he planned to delay an executive order on immigration. Obama told her he would "be making an announcement soon." On October 16, after making an Oval Office statement on Ebola, Obama was asked by a pool reporter if he would appoint an Ebola czar. "If I appoint somebody, I'll let you know," he said.

At an April joint press conference in Manila with President Benigno Aquino, Obama deflected a question from Talev about further sanctions against prominent Russians, only confirming that an announcement would be made later in the day, and that it would build on past sanctions. And when Henry took the issue up a notch, asking Obama to lay out his foreign policy vision and noting criticism of the president's approach, Obama revealed some testiness. "Well, Ed, I doubt that I'm going to have time to lay out my entire foreign policy doctrine. And there are actually some complimentary pieces as well about my foreign policy, but I'm not sure you ran them," Obama said. He then went on at length about occasions when his approach had been successful, defining his foreign policy in a manner he had previously—that he would use military force as a last resort.

What is baffling to White House reporters is that they believe the White House wants to find ways to make sure the press knows how the president makes decisions. When the administration wants to tout a success, the White House makes officials available (again, generally on background) to provide the "tick-tock" of how the decision-making unfolded. But the administration wrestles with how to do that while still keeping a tight grip on "the message." Often the White House wants to have it both ways. On an overseas trip last year, the president came to the back of the plane for an off-the-record session with the travel pool. "My foreign policy," Obama reportedly told the group, "is don't do stupid shit." In case anyone thought that was an offhand remark, the president, leaving for the front of the plane, turned around and channeled his old role as instructor: "So what's my foreign policy?" he asked. "Don't do stupid shit," the media responded in sing-song unison. Reporters honored the off-the-record terms of that session, but the phrase was later repeated by administration officials to reporters from the *Los Angeles Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, and *The New York Times*. Reporters ran with it, and the White House was upset. "They wanted it to get out, then they complained about it getting out," Baker said.

AS HE DID ON AIR FORCE ONE, THE PRESIDENT OCCASIONALLY holds off-the-record sessions with reporters. But again, journalists say they are not especially revelatory. Some of that may be a function of the president himself. Obama hadn't spent

'It is the catchphrases, it's those little tweet-sized words and phrases by which we measure our presidents now.'

much time in Washington before he became president, and so didn't develop the sort of mutually trusting relationship reporters foster with Capitol Hill lawmakers. And while most first-time presidential candidates start out having just a few reporters following them in Iowa, Gibbs noted, Obama's campaign started out in the equivalent of a football stadium. The president respects the press corps and understands, from an institutional perspective, the important role it plays—he just doesn't always understand or agree with the way reporters execute it, Earnest and Gibbs both said. Obama, Gibbs explained, does not come naturally to the media game in Washington. And the irritation sometimes shows in his interactions with the press.

When reporters, after a presidential meeting with Central American leaders, tried to ask Obama questions about refugees, Obama chafed. "Actually, I wasn't going to take questions, but let me just respond to this particular question because I felt like some of the stories were a little over-crunked," the president said. He then explained that refugee status was reserved for very specific circumstances, and said he hoped people would apply for such status in their home countries instead of taking a "dangerous" trip to the Texas border.

"This breathless, moment by moment, eternal cycle of cable news—that's what he doesn't like," said David Nakamura, a White House correspondent for *The Washington Post*. "It's superficial. [The administration thinks] it's more about the 'gotcha.' That probably gets on his nerves."

That came through in Obama's August 1 news conference, in which he appeared annoyed that no one had asked him how and why things were so much rosier than when he took office. Finally, Obama said, "I think it's useful for me to end by just reminding folks that, in my first term, if I had a press conference like this, typically, everybody would want to ask about the economy and how come jobs weren't being created, and how come the housing market is still bad, and why isn't it working. Well, you know what, what we did work. And the economy is better. And when I say that we've just had six months of [adding] more than 200,000 jobs [per month] that hasn't happened in 17 years, that shows you the power of persistence. It shows you that if you stay at it, eventually we make some progress. All right?"

Several questions ensued, about Ebola and CIA Director John Brennan, and Obama again seemed irked. He joked that

no one had asked him about his looming birthday plans, then added, "You're not that pent up. I've been giving you questions lately."

That exchange underscored the grave distance between the press corps and the president many had covered day in, day out, for more than six years. And it raises an uncomfortable question: Is there any point, anymore, to having a dedicated White House press corps, scrambling for any contact with the famously enigmatic president? At what point does spending 11 or more hours a day following around one man become a fool's errand, better replaced by coverage of the White House and its occupants from afar? If the distance between the president and the press corps is becoming so institutionalized, why bother trying to bridge it?

Correspondents say that despite the frustration of trying to break through, there is real value in getting a chance to see the president in action, be it at a formal press conference or at the top of a bilateral meeting with a foreign leader. And what appears from a distance to be superficial contact with the president—watching him as he gets in and out of his limousine, or when he walks into a meeting—can help the press gauge his mood.

Los Angeles Times writer Christi Parsons, president of the White House Correspondents Association, says the omnipresence of the press corps keeps the White House from concealing some major secrets—such as the state of the president's health. In some countries, Parsons noted, a leader could become ill and no one would know. Just watching Obama get in and out of the presidential limousine on the way to events gives her a chance to see if he looks well, or angry, or worried. Yes, access is limited, and yes, Parsons abhors the "TV grandstanding" she sometimes sees at presidential press conferences. But "you can't underestimate the importance of a vigorous, independent press that provides this eye on things all the time," Parsons said. Or as the president might call it, getting "a little over-crunked." **CJR**

SUSAN MILLIGAN, a Washington, DC-based freelance writer, covered the White House in the 1990s for the *New York Daily News*, and in 2009-10 for *The Boston Globe*. Transcripts of the 2014 press conferences and briefings can be found at whitehouse.gov/briefing-room. This piece was paid for by the Helen Thomas Fund, in memory of the trailblazing White House Correspondent.

steal this idea

BY MARC FISHER

I could frame this piece about plagiarism by starting with a little verse about a renowned professor who won his fame by appropriating the work of another:

*Let no one else's work evade your eyes
Remember why the good Lord made your eyes
So don't shade your eyes
But plagiarize, plagiarize, plagiarize ...
Only be sure always to call it please 'research.'*

I might credit the author of those lines, the satirist and folk singer Tom Lehrer, but you'd likely think me less clever for merely quoting someone when I could have used an idea of my own.

Perhaps I should start off with what put plagiarism back in journalism's center court—a series of allegations against prominent writers such as CNN's Fareed Zakaria, *The New Yorker's* Malcolm Gladwell, and BuzzFeed's Benny Johnson. Surely I could get away with quoting from the allegations without any attribution because the two bloggers who investigated the journalists have remained anonymous. They don't even *want* credit for their work!

To get at the meta-ness at the heart of journalism's plagiarism problem—the basic question of how we define plagiarism right now—I could pierce through the jabber with this bit of provocation: Substantially all ideas are secondhand, consciously and unconsciously drawn from a million outside sources. The actual and valuable material of all human utterances is plagiarism.

Those last two sentences, I admit, are not mine. The novelist Jonathan Lethem wrote them in *Harper's* (and, actually, he didn't come up with those sentences, either—he took them from Mark Twain). He's so critical of the rigid way most journalists think about plagiarism that he probably wouldn't mind if I took his words and used them here, so long as I added an additional thought of my own, a bit of a remix.

I'd start with his two sentences and attach a fillip of my own, something like this: Journalists are so fragile right now, so damaged by years of newsroom cuts and diminishing impact, that we're more intent than ever on proving our purity, to ourselves and to our readers. We will therefore land ferociously on any miscreant who borrows even four or five words from another source. We will turn ourselves into the plagiarism police, vainly straining to show that our work is original, when, in fact, nearly all journalism is second-order—that is, we discover, report, and interpret the ideas and actions of others.

The conventions of this profession require that I give Lethem credit for his words, both because simply appropriating his language would be theft of a sort, and because

I'd be mucking with the basic compact between writer and reader—the idea that in journalism, credibility is our all.

Both journalism and plagiarism have fallen into a murky new reality in which there's no clear consensus about the old rules. Even the authorities who make the rules disagree over basic definitions. What is plagiarism in a world in which musicians appropriate digital samples of other people's work into their own creations, only to be praised as innovators? What is plagiarism to an audience that grew up believing it's okay to appropriate—really, steal—movies, music, and chunks of written work from the internet? What is plagiarism when prominent lawyers and public policy advocates argue that excessive restraints on the reuse of intellectual content inhibit Americans' creativity?

Artists, musicians, novelists, and even lawyers now debate whether strict old rules about plagiarism unduly restrict what the Constitution calls "the Progress of Science and useful Arts"—the basis for laws of copyright. But is journalism so different from other creative terrain that we must hew to standards that are being relaxed in so many other parts of our culture? Must journalistic rules established way back when cut and paste was a literal instruction now be considered immutable?

This all used to seem so simple: Plagiarism, our high school teachers taught us, is wrong. The Society of Professional Journalists' position paper on the topic is blunt: "Never plagiarize," it says. "Whether inadvertent or deliberate, there is no excuse for plagiarism."

But plagiarism is not that simple. Many old-school purists would agree that if I reworked Lethem's sentences, I would not be a plagiarist—even if my new wording made liberal use of his idea. Why are we stricter about the use of someone else's words than we are about claiming his ideas, when the underlying idea is usually more important than the specific wording? In music, visual art, and an increasing number of other fields, lifting a passage or image from another author can be an honorable act. Call it remix, call it sampling—it's a communal path toward creativity. Yet lifting even a few words from someone else can still get a reporter sacked. How can that be right?

A

t the risk of exacerbating the generational divide engulfing journalism, let's start by recognizing that some of the current conflict about plagiarism does trace to the year you were born. Things are shifting so quickly that when Susan Drucker teaches journalism and media ethics courses at Hofstra University in New York, she sees a significant gulf between, say, 23-year-olds and 17-year-olds.

"The graduate students still see literary theft as stealing," she says, "but the 17- and 18-year-old undergraduates don't see this as wrong. It's so easy to copy material on the internet," they say. "How can it be wrong?"

Drucker doesn't buy into the idea that the undergrads will come to see that the rules are the rules, and that they make sense. "Just look at the language: People don't even say 'copying' or 'theft;' they say 'borrowing' or 'inserting.' As the language changes, so does the sense of guilt. We're becoming comfortable as a culture with the idea that if we add any value at all, we can take credit and authorship. That may seem offensive to older journalists, but in a way, the young people are right, because digital technologies dis-embed: They make it harder to identify the real source of origin. If I mention an article I saw in *The New York Times*, my students will say they read it on Reddit or through Twitter. By the time it reaches them, they're not aware of the original source, and they don't care."

Still, that's the classroom, not the newsroom, where one would think the dictates of the marketplace and the traditions of the craft would help maintain a useful distinction between work that is new and that which is recycled. Not so. The same technology that has softened the definition of plagiarism has also made it radically easier to plagiarize, intentionally or not. "I just cut and pasted and then I forgot," say many reporters who have been caught using lifted language. Copied material gets inserted into a reporter's draft and before you know it, the reporter is saying, "I forgot to change the wording," or "I forgot to insert attribution."

"Building on others' stories is nothing new," says Steve Buttry, a longtime editor, most recently at Digital First Media, who teaches and coaches journalists at Louisiana State University. "There was always a genre of story we called the 'clip job,' where a reporter parachuted in, did some original reporting to advance the story, but mainly relied on a whole lot of stuff from other sources that wasn't credited. What's new is that there are people out there being plagiarism cops."

Two prominent members of that new breed of wording police are so much a product of the digital age that they are known only by their Twitter handles, @blippoblapo and @crushingbort, authors of the blog Our Bad Media. Since last summer, the two word cops have used digital technology to level detailed allegations of plagiarism against foreign affairs columnist Zakaria of CNN and *The Washington Post*; Johnson, a master of the listicle at BuzzFeed; and *The New Yorker's* Gladwell.

Zakaria was previously accused of lifting language from books and articles by other writers; CNN suspended and then reinstated him. His bosses defended him against a second wave of allegations, with *Washington Post* editorial page

editor Fred Hiatt saying it's hardly plagiarism to use the same facts that someone else has cited.

Johnson was caught pasting into his own work phrases and sentences from Wikipedia, Yahoo Answers, and a slew of magazines and newspapers. He was immediately sacked at BuzzFeed but quickly landed a job as a social media editor at *National Review*, with Politico's Mike Allen noting that the plagiarist was getting a "surprisingly quick shot at redemption." In February, Johnson joined Independent Journal Review as creative content director.

Since the authors of the blog Our Bad Media won't say who they are or what they do for a living (they say they are not working journalists), we know nothing about their motives, ideological or otherwise. But whether you view the duo as vigilantes or the vanguard of a consumer-driven era of accountability, they have forced editors to consider their allegations and provide answers. Yet despite Our Bad Media's exhaustive detailing of similarities between their targets' stories and the sources they failed to cite, all of the alleged plagiarists are still gainfully employed.

Gladwell's editor, David Remnick, responded to the case against his writer with a statement wondering how best to credit a source: "The issue is an ongoing editorial challenge known to writers and editors everywhere—to what extent should a piece of journalism, which doesn't have the apparatus of academic footnotes, credit secondary sources? It's an issue that can get complicated when there are many sources with overlapping information."



he violations that Our Bad Media seeks to chronicle are the old-fashioned kind: Writers incorporating someone else's work into their own. But a major contributor to the haze around plagiarism these days is a different and rapidly growing kind of journalism—aggregation.

Many editors I spoke to say a disproportionate number of recent plagiarism cases result from the growing practice of producing articles based entirely or mostly on the work of others. Aggregation, many say, makes journalists—especially young ones—especially susceptible to word larceny.

At new media outlets such as BuzzFeed and Mashable as well as at old-line print and broadcast operations, aggregation has emerged as a cheap and effective way to cover a far broader array of news than current staff levels might otherwise support. Aggregation is hardly new; "from combined sources" is a line that ran over countless news stories in papers for upwards of a century, as editors cobbled together accounts using wires and files from major newspapers. But the new aggregators are under increasing pressure



to produce fresh copy in the moment to take advantage of whatever's trending on social media.

"With aggregation, there's definitely an erosion of attribution," says Jonathan Bailey, 34, a consultant who blogs at Plagiarism Today and investigates plagiarism allegations for clients, including some news organizations. "The people doing the copying and pasting think they're just sharing the way they would on Facebook. And employers sometimes look the other way because there is money in the added traffic: If I aggregate your story, I'm capturing some of your search traffic and that can cost you tens of thousands in revenue."

Julie Westfall runs the Real-Time News Desk at the *Los Angeles Times*, where she and five reporters try to keep the *Times'* site at the leading edge of events. Their goal is to do as much original reporting as they can, but the nature of breaking and trending news is that the first accounts often come from elsewhere.

"Our job is to help get confirmed stuff on all of our platforms as quickly as possible," says Westfall, 34. "We aggregate when someone has something confirmed that we can't get right away." Although there's no written rule, Westfall tells her staff that "we need to say where stuff comes from," as in "police told the Associated Press that . . ."

But in the moment, such decisions aren't always simple. "My team and *The Washington Post*'s and Gawker and BuzzFeed are all figuring out when to attribute," Westfall says. "That's where there could be a generational difference. Young people are more likely to say the information is out there and you can't ignore it. Sometimes it's not efficient to keep trying to get hold of a person to essentially say the same thing that they've already said to another reporter."

In the cultural battles over aggregation, the word "plagiarism" gets bandied about all too loosely. Often, the grumbling about aggregation is really more about basic courtesy. In January, an editor at the *Guardian*, Erin McCann, tweaked BuzzFeed on Twitter for publishing a story based almost entirely on a *Guardian* reporter's account of the opening of Paul Revere's time capsule at a Boston museum. The journalistic infraction was not plagiarism—after all, the BuzzFeed piece was made up primarily of the *Guardian* reporter's tweets, prominently including his name. But nowhere did

BuzzFeed acknowledge the *Guardian*, at least not until McCann complained, after which BuzzFeed added a hat tip to the bottom of its piece.

"It would have been nice if they'd said in the text of the BuzzFeed piece that a *Guardian* reporter was on the scene and reported the story," Westfall says. "The fact that that's

not done in every single story is the result of the shades of gray"—the lingering uncertainty about when to attribute.

The rule is simple for Buttry, who says he saw several cases of aggregation that crossed the line into plagiarism when he worked at Digital First Media, the newspaper chain that experimented with a heavy emphasis on aggregation for its national and foreign coverage. "They all resulted in discipline, typically a stern rebuke and suspension," he says.

Buttry offers a four-word solution: When in doubt, attribute. "Sometimes you don't remember where you got an idea, or it's a mash-up," he says. "But when you know the source of your inspiration, you should acknowledge it, maybe in the story or maybe in a social media post or even an email to the original reporter. Then that person feels flattered, not ripped off."

That solution, however, assumes that the plagiarist knows he's doing something considered morally wrong. How do you defend against a misdeed when its perpetrators don't think they've broken any rules?

I called a bunch of people who had been caught plagiarizing and had lost their jobs because of it. Some didn't return my messages; those who did said the last thing they wanted to do was freshen up the Google references to the worst episode in their lives.

"The best thing is to just be honest about it," says one former reporter who got caught and never found another job in journalism. "The conversation about plagiarism needs to happen. I'd just rather not be defined by it. All I can say is that anytime you make a mistake like that, it has a short-term and a long-term impact, and both of them are huge."

As a young reporter at a small newspaper, this man lifted a chunk of a press release and put it directly into his story about a local business. The reporter says he thought what he did was considered okay—he was getting the same information across either way, and there wasn't anything special about the news release's wording.

Hearing that he was going to be fired, he quit. Later, he told prospective employers that he'd done "something really, really stupid" and wanted to redeem himself.

Now, he says, he realizes he broke the rules, but he believes plenty of others in his position do the same thing without the slightest notion that they are jeopardizing their jobs.

Kelly McBride spends a lot of her time working with editors who've caught plagiarists and with reporters who've been found out. McBride, who for many years has taught ethics at the Poynter Institute, has no doubt that people who intentionally steal others' work should be fired. Still, she has a root empathy for those who get caught, especially for those she considers petty plagiarists—that is, those with no pattern of abuse.

Often, she says, those cases involve people who panic. Three plagiarists I spoke to blamed their infractions on moving too quickly under pressure to produce, an excuse for which many editors have zero patience, since journalism has always valued speed.

But McBride says the combination of a stepped-up pace of production and a sharp decrease in supervision is producing many more infractions. "These are mostly young people who struggle with the mechanics of writing," she says, "and when you struggle with mechanics, you are much, much more likely to plagiarize."

Add the thinning ranks of editors and you have a problem. "I started out sitting next to editors who showed me, okay, let's find the subject and the verb in this sentence, editors who stuck with me," McBride says. "Without the grace of those editors, I don't know that I'd have made it. In most newsrooms right now, that doesn't happen."

On top of the lack of guidance, there's the shift toward a remix culture and the resulting confusion about what constitutes honest aggregation. "As journalism institutions, we are not clear about standards when we ask people to aggregate," McBride says. "When those young people who start out as aggregators move into original reporting, they will be confused."



Mid that jumble of standards, under the crushing power of the scarlet P, is it time for a ceasefire in the war on plagiarism? Some notorious plagiarists are serial offenders—con artists and fabulists such as Jayson Blair or Stephen Glass—but should there be different penalties for those who broke rules that were never clear to them in the first place?

No one argues for wholesale theft of others' work, but a growing chorus of academics and others find it counterproductive to focus on rooting out scofflaws. As far back as the 19th century, the German poet Heinrich Heine, citing literary stealing by Goethe and Shakespeare, wrote that "Nothing is sillier than this charge of plagiarism. ... The poet dare help himself wherever ... he finds material suited to his work."

In all forms of art and culture, appropriation of others' work is essential to creativity, Lethem contends. The American mistake, he says, has been to adopt a mercantile, legalistic ethic in which a piece of writing is a commercial product rather than a way to advance ideas and spread information for the public good.

Lawrence Lessig, a Harvard law professor, takes the notion that ideas want to be free a step farther. In his books, *Free Culture* and *Remix*, Lessig says it's wrong to apply to writing the same rules we use to protect against theft. "Ideas released to the world are free," he writes. "I don't take anything from you when I copy the way you dress." He quotes Thomas Jefferson: "He who receives an idea from me, receives instruction himself without lessening mine; as he who lights his taper at mine, receives light without darkening me."

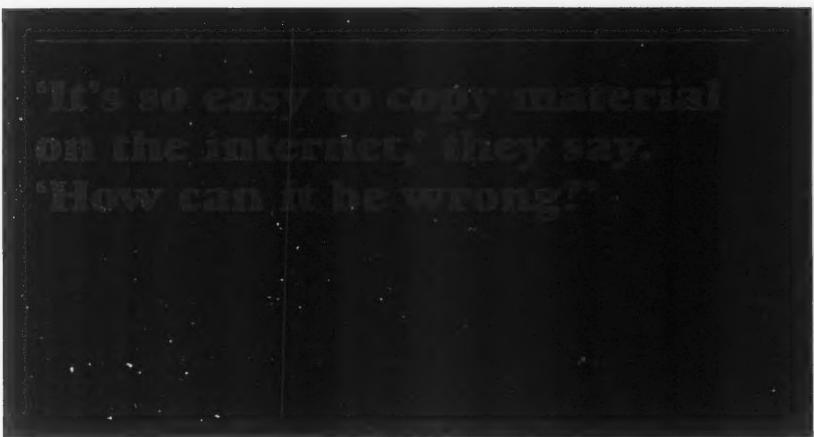
Gladwell, responding to Our Bad Media's allegations, directed readers to a piece he wrote for *The New Yorker* in 2004 about his reaction when a playwright used, without attribution, passages from one of his own articles. Initially miffed, Gladwell examined why plagiarism has become such an ethical tripwire. When he finally confronted the playwright, Bryony Lavery, about why she hadn't credited him for the material, she told him: "I thought it was OK to use it . . . I thought it was news."

Gladwell found some merit in that notion. "When I worked at a newspaper," he wrote, "we were routinely dispatched to 'match' a story from the *Times*: to do a new version of someone else's idea. But had we 'matched' any of the *Times'* words—even the most banal of phrases—it could have been a firing offense."

That notion of originality, Gladwell concluded, is "the narcissism of small differences: Because journalism cannot own up to its heavily derivative nature, it must enforce originality on the level of the sentence." He decided to let go of his offense over his words being appropriated; he would no longer pretend "that a writer's words have a virgin birth and an eternal life."

Does that mean Gladwell wouldn't mind if I took one of his elegant *New Yorker* pieces and published it under my byline in *The Washington Post*, where we were once colleagues? Of course not, because by merely stealing his words, I would not be doing anything creative. If, however, I published an annotated version of his story, challenging or building upon his reporting and thinking, Gladwell might feel honored.

Even among journalism's purists, there's a growing sense that although giving credit to others is essential, the remix culture has enriched a creative person's toolkit. "Before the internet, I don't think we appreciated the way borrowing and sampling informed original work," McBride says. "I'm a



"It's so easy to copy material
on the internet, they say.
How can it be wrong?"

parent of an actress/comedian and a musician and I see how their work is built on other stuff. We in journalism developed this false pride where journalists feel diminished giving credit to others who've done similar work. It's so silly."

Even the man who sells software designed to catch plagiarists recognizes that nailing people for lifting a few words is a misdemeanor compared to the felony of stealing someone else's ideas. But prosecuting misdemeanors has a larger purpose, says Chris Harrick, an executive of Turnitin, a purveyor of plagiarism detection software that's popular among universities and has a few media clients as well.

"Plagiarizing ideas is abstract," he says, "so people go after text matches." It's analogous to the controversial "broken windows" idea in criminal justice: By attacking the little infractions, you set the bar, diminishing the likelihood that bad guys will attempt more severe crimes. Letting low-level violators slip away by making excuses about the nature of digital culture is buying into moral and ethical decline, Harrick says.

"People still care about fairness, about maintaining social and moral barriers against dishonesty," he says. "There's a lot of worry that the lines of originality have been blurred with retweeting, sharing, and sampling, so kids from middle school to college often don't have a good sense of what it means to be original."

This strikes Gene Weingarten as hokum. I called my longtime editor and friend because he had written a piece contending, in his usual genteel manner, that the sacking of Benny Johnson for serially plagiarizing BuzzFeed listicles was "petty bull-poo."

Weingarten, who writes a column in *The Washington Post Magazine*, says using a hair-trigger definition of plagiarism in the brave new world of aggregation and digital sweatshops mocks the real thing. "In the public mind, real plagiarism is conflated with trivial stuff," Weingarten says. "Nobody expects an aggregated story to be entirely original work. If you're reading a listicle on BuzzFeed about North Korea, do people think the writer produced nine pieces in

one day and went to Pyongyang in his spare time?"

Weingarten sees an important difference between deliberate stealing of someone's creative work and careless copying of boilerplate information. "I would be happy to join my tut-tutting brethren and denounce this sort of lazy, crappy writing so long as we

don't call it 'plagiarism,'" he says. The lesser infraction is "a failure of creativity and diligence, not a serious ethical flaw."

So, I ask, what material is okay to copy? A couple of grafts from a routine police story? "No, that's the reporter's own work," he replies. "He went out and put himself in a dangerous situation to get that."

Fine, how about a quote from the president's speech? "That's not stealing," Weingarten says. Even if I pick up some other reporter's transcribing error? "That's bad, but it's laziness, not plagiarism," he says.

We go on like this for a while before Weingarten grumbles that I've dragged him into exactly what he objects to about the new gotcha plagiarism-hunting: "It's this kindergarten game of 'what's okay?'"

So where does that leave us? How do we focus on real, pernicious, trust-busting plagiarism without spending undue energy sniffing out people who fail to reword a smart phrase they ran across in their reporting?

"I feel certain there is a way to define what's real plagiarism and what's trivial," Gene says. "The way is to ask me on a case-by-case basis."

A funny notion now, in the age of Our Bad Media and Turnitin, when the entire world has been deputized as the plagiarism police. But what Weingarten suggests is exactly the way it worked Before Google. Editors decided, period.

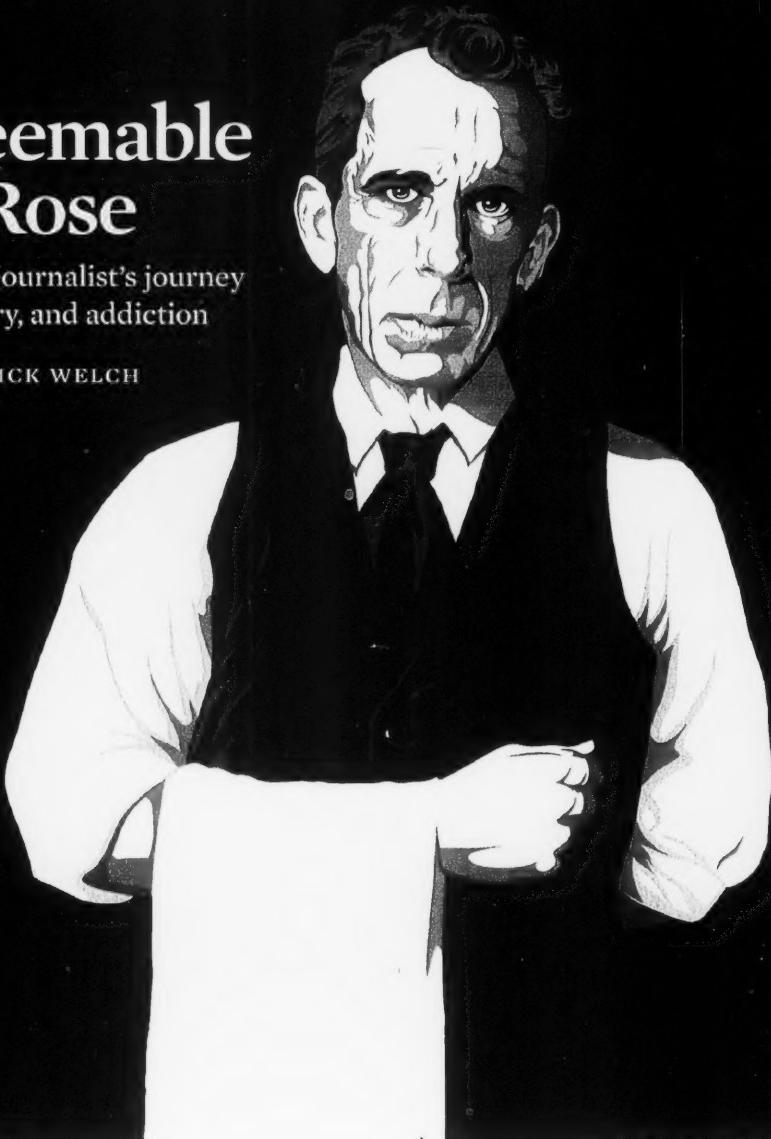
The world has changed. Undoubtedly, a culture in which sparkling achievements and insights are available for anyone to reshape makes for a richer intellectual landscape. It would be a shame to limit creativity because a software program can ferret out every reuse of a perfect phrase. Journalism must always be about honesty, clarity, and credibility. Those foundations will not be shaken if we make our definition of plagiarism more complex, mapping a spectrum on which minor infractions fall on one end and wholesale theft on the other. We are still responsible for governing ourselves. Dive into the ocean of ideas, grab the tastiest bits, make creative use of them—but always with generous, plentiful nods to those who came before you. Culture changes constantly. Courtesy and respect are forever. **CJR**

MARC FISHER is a senior editor at The Washington Post.

The irredeemable Chris Rose

A Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist's journey through heartache, glory, and addiction

BY MICHAEL PATRICK WELCH



Chris Rose's Pulitzer trophy sits on the shelf in his small French Quarter apartment, the crystal badly chipped from various accidents. "For Distinguished Commentary, *Times-Picayune*," the disfigured trophy reads, a reminder of both prowess and loss. ¶ "The way the people of New Orleans made me feel after Hurricane Katrina—like I was holding this fucking city together all by myself," Rose tells me at the Napoleon House restaurant and bar, in a graffitied payphone nook where he's eaten, drunk, and written for a dozen-plus years. "At the time, we had Ray Nagin as mayor;

all the city institutions and individuals had failed everyone. *The Times-Picayune* really stepped it up. And I was the face of *The Times-Picayune*."

Rose's collection of post-Katrina *Picayune* columns, *I Dead In Attic* (Simon and Schuster), became a *New York Times* bestseller in 2007. Since then, New Orleans' news community has seemingly cast Rose aside. No journalism

entity in town will hire him, he tells me, not even freelance. If they do answer his calls, they say he's too much of a risk. And so for all of 2014, the 53-year-old Rose was waiting tables to pay rent and feed his three kids.

Rose looks noticeably fraiser, his curly hair thinner, since the public last saw him. He looks like what he is: a man who has fallen, and gotten up, and fallen again. He won his Pulitzer

by writing about his intense personal struggles following Katrina. A newspaper columnist who had once been known for celebrity gossip, Rose's public persona was reborn. He used his column as catharsis, writing emotional, first-person accounts that spoke to—and represented—a suffering community.

Sitting and eating a muffaletta, and later strolling around the French Quarter, Rose is recognized and stopped by people from all over the country who tell him how much his work has meant to them. "I teach *I Dead In Attic* as part of my college course," two separate people divulge.

Over the last year, Rose also received many compliments on his writing while refilling his customers' water glasses at the seafood and cocktail bar Kingfish, a job he recently left. "I'd walk up to the table and they'd fuckin' drop their spoons," Rose laughs, his eyes welling up slightly as he nibbles on "crawtater"-flavored Zapp's chips. "When they realized it wasn't a joke or for a story, they'd tend to get more upset than I ever did about it. It's not what I dreamed of doing at this point in my life either, but I found myself having to comfort them more than they comforted me."

When CJR last reported on Rose in 2008, his tale was one of redemption; he'd shaken an oxycontin painkiller addiction in rehab in order to serve as a bone-marrow donor for his leukemia-stricken sister. But while Rose suffered through rehab, his wife served him divorce papers. "I stayed clean until my sister died in the summer of 2007," says Rose, who remained clean and clear-eyed all through the publicity run for *I Dead In Attic* on the flood's second anniversary, including TV appearances with *Morning Edition* and CBS' *The Early Show*. After that, he says, "I'd lost my sister and my marriage, so I went back to eating Vicodin."

His editors noticed this, and bade him get help. Rose's *Times-Picayune* health insurance funded his second trip to rehab—this time in Washington, DC, where Rose could hide out while also helping his parents move into an assisted living facility.

"After I came back [to New Orleans] that second time, I had written so much about depression, and I'd learned so much about addiction ... that I wanted to do for addiction what I had done for depression," Rose recalls, sipping a Pimm's cup, because he doesn't fear booze, and doesn't use the word recovery. "But *The Times-Picayune* finally decided that New Orleans had heard enough of my personal story."

Rose continued writing a more lighthearted column, even as he watched the *Picayune* begin its infamous 2009 contractions by offering buyouts to all employees 65-and-over: one full year's salary plus health insurance for all voluntary

resignations. When, months later, the same buyout was offered to all *Picayune* employees, Rose packed up his desk that day.

With the *The Times-Picayune* receiving all royalties from *I Dead In Attic*, Rose continued hustling, writing cover stories for *Oxford American* magazine and a Mardi Gras episode of David Simon's HBO series *Treme*. He became a columnist at *Gambit Weekly*. Rose found a secondary niche reporting community and culture segments for Fox 8 news. "At that point, I'm on TV three nights a week," says Rose. "Everybody knew my name, now everybody knows my face."

New Orleans is neither big nor easy; it is small and challenging. Most in the media here hit their ceiling pretty quickly. With Katrina's aid, however, Rose had shattered that ceiling. He managed to represent New Orleans while also transcending it. He'd escaped drugs and was now getting great work, and much love from the city. But rather than his increasingly public face, it was Rose's right hand that caused his third undoing.

"It was a mysterious congenital problem. My thumb stopped working," claims Rose. "I was in great pain. I couldn't write. They did surgery ... took out a couple bones, replaced it with some steel, then a cast up to my fingertips and up above my elbow. What I thought was gonna be three weeks out of work was five months [physically] incapacitated."

**'It took me a while to realize
... I'm not gonna get a job here.
And I had no other marketable
skills. For 30 years there's
never been any question of
what I was going to do.'**

"I also knew going into the surgery that I was going to get addicted again," Rose admits. "This is a common problem for addicts."

Rose finally resumed work in 2011, still hazy on pills. "I came back to *Gambit*, I came back to Fox 8, and I faltered terribly at both. That's when I started missing deadlines and doing shit work." It's tough for even Rose to pinpoint when he wandered off the *Gambit Weekly* job, but the magazine never ran another piece of his writing, and now rarely, if ever, answers his emails.

Rose took the hint and re-entered rehab for a third time in New Orleans. Addict lore claims that rehab sticks the third time. Rose sucks his Pimm's cup down to the ice and recalls this heavy decision in the same stark, sentimental terms he might use in one of his ledes: "First time I went to rehab to save my marriage—didn't work, lost my marriage and my

sister. Second time I went to save my job—I left my job. Third time, I went to save my life."

Back home, Fox 8 held Rose's position for him. "They made a great act of faith and flew me back one week per month, and I would tape eight segments at once," says Rose, for whom Fox 8 rented French Quarter hotel accommodations each visit. This would not last: Calling him a "luxury we can't afford," Fox 8 finally released Rose for "budgetary reasons." "Their budget cuts came down to releasing the lowest-paid, most popular person on their staff," Rose says, pushing away some uneaten seeded muffaletta bun. "And no other budget cuts. Just me."

Rose theorizes that his TV career was actually ended by an unhappy Tom Benson, owner of Fox 8 and the New Orleans Saints football franchise: "He was hosting the Super Bowl and I questioned some of the city's spending on cosmetics when people in Gentilly still didn't have streetlights," he says, leaning back in his seat. The Fox 8 organization answered Rose's accusations thoroughly in an April 2013 *Times-Picayune* piece. Mikel Schaefer later told CJR that two other Fox 8 positions were, in fact, "affected" for budgetary reasons a few weeks after Rose was cut. But he declined to comment on why Rose hasn't filmed a Fox 8 segment since.

Clean, sober, and again a free agent, Rose this time found himself deeply unemployed. Having been praised for understanding New Orleans in a special way, he suddenly, finally, also understood its smallness. "For seven months I was getting turned down. I kept thinking, 'Someone is gonna hire me. I'm Chris Rose.' It took a while for me to realize, all these unreturned phone calls... I'm not gonna get a job here. And I had no other marketable skills. For 30 years there's never been any question of what I was gonna do."

Rose dipped into the well of community love and raised \$57,332 from 387 backers in 30 days via Kickstarter, ostensibly to write a new book about his continuing struggles. He promised that he would write, for each donor of \$10,000, their personal biography, no less than 50 pages long. Al Copeland Junior, Popeye's Chicken heir and CEO, paid \$30,000 for a 150-page biography (which Rose claims he works on a little every day). To \$35 donors, Rose promised: "A walking tour of the French Quarter, blending history, pop culture and tawdry gossip. From the House of the Rising Sun to The Playboy Club; from the studio where R.E.M. and Iggy Pop made records to the apartments where Tennessee Williams made literary history."

Rose's donors would convene on a specified French Quarter street corner for their big tour—only after Rose finished his new book. "The dirty secret, though," said Rose, "was that I'd never written a book before. The last one was just a collection of columns I didn't even have to edit." Rose ran through the Kickstarter money without finishing a first draft.

It was then he knew that he had to tie on the server's apron.

At Kingfish, Rose continued serving his fans—as well as his fellow New Orleans celebrities. "This waiter walks up and it took me probably way too long to realize, *Oh my god, I know who you are*. I was absolutely startled," says Harry Shearer, comedic actor, voice of many *Simpsons* characters, and part-time New Orleanian. "To go from an essential voice to a forgotten voice in the relative blink of an eye is pretty shocking.

For a city that reveres tradition and history, a city full of second chances, it seems very puritanical what seems to have happened to Chris."

Rose orders a second Pimm's cup to go and we step out into the sunny sweater-weather that passes for winter in Louisiana. Though a natural front-of-house schmoozer, and beloved by his coworkers, Rose tells me he lasted just one year waiting tables. "It was killing my soul. I wasn't making enough money," he moaned to me, pitching his to-go cup in a nearby can. "I'm not seeing my kids: I'd leave for work when they were getting home from school, then I'd get home at one in the morning. I'm tired. I'm not writing." When he fell into another deep depression this past November, Rose quit showing up at Kingfish.

Since then, Rose has been working for the New Orleans grocery store, Rouse's—writing for the local market's companion trade magazine, covering food and other local cultural staples, making four times the price that *Gambit* or *Times-Picayune* pays freelancers. "That's how I end up writing for a grocery store, the most lucrative freelance gig for any writer in New Orleans," laughs Rose, who is grateful to have one sweet gig and an outlet for his voice.

While shaking off his writer's rust with Rouse's, Rose has also begun studying for the French Quarter tour guide exam. "I have a passion for public speaking," he says as we wander said Quarter, past a band of young street musicians struggling to sound and look like old street musicians. "I see people paying \$20 apiece for some guy to spend two-and-a-half hours telling stories while he's drinking a beer—that would take me three restaurant shifts of eight hours apiece to make that much money. Plus, these guys are making up ghost stories, when there are so many true stories in this town."

His name, he hopes, will be part of the draw. "If I was nobody, there is no way I could pull it off," Rose admits, lighting a cigarette on the corner of Burgundy and St. Louis. He looks awkward smoking—like's he's old enough to know better. "I am counting on the fact that I can go to the concierges and have instant credibility. And what I love is there's also a lot of writing involved: I'm gonna publish a book with each tour, so you can also just buy the book and take the tour yourself."

As Rose explains his new plan to me, a man with Louisiana plates rolls down his truck's window to interrupt us: "You still writing? You in any newspapers?" he asks Rose. "You were in the *Gambit* last I saw you."

"That was a long time ago," Rose responds.

"I remember the speech you gave at Sacred Heart Academy after Katrina." The man nods his head. "Best speech I ever heard."

He drives away and Rose continues, "There might be 10 editors in town who won't let me write, but there are three quarters of a million people who will pay to hear what I have to say. They love me and I love them. So, we will reconvene on the street corner, and I will tell 'em stories." CJR

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The foreign desk in transition

A hybrid approach to reporting from there—and here

BY ANUP KAPHLE

When *The Washington Post's* new owner, Jeff Bezos, met the newsroom for the first time in September of 2013, he mentioned two recent *Post* stories that he'd found particularly intriguing. ¶ The first was a human-interest feature on the death of a bouncer, the kind of richly descriptive narrative that has been a *Post* hallmark for decades. But Bezos' other favorite was something of a surprise: a 2,800-word piece published in the *Post's* foreign affairs blog, headlined "9 questions about Syria you were too embarrassed to ask."

Conceived and reported in Washington by a *Post* digital journalist, and written for an online audience, the Syria piece addressed readers in a conversational tone rarely, if ever, used in traditional foreign reporting. If you "aren't exactly sure why Syria is fighting a civil war, or even where Syria is located," wrote blogger Max Fisher, "this is the article for you." No need to feel embarrassed, he continued. "What's happening in Syria is really important, but it can also be confusing and difficult to follow even for those of us glued to it."

Even without the newsroom plug from Bezos, "9 questions" was already grabbing attention inside and outside the *Post*. "9 questions" got over three million pageviews on WorldViews, the foreign news blog that is one of the paper's main experiments in international digital journalism. Compare that to the potential audience for a top international story in the print newspaper: About 475,000 subscribers receive it, and on a good day a single foreign desk article might get another 100,000 pageviews online.

So, is "9 questions" the future of international news: breezy, digital-first, and written by someone in an office thousands of miles from the scene? Perhaps the best answer is, it's a piece of the hybrid that is foreign news reporting today at the *Post* and other mainstream organizations committed to serious international coverage.

In at least two legacy newsrooms, *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*, journalists who don't leave the office are daily contributors to the foreign report, aggregating,

curating, and yes, doing original reporting—for WorldViews at the *Post*, and for *The New York Times'* Open Source column by Robert Mackey.

Their varied labels—blog, column—hint at the uncertainty that hangs over traditional foreign desks in this transitional age. Each of those digital features offers interesting, innovative reporting. Each is part of mainstream media's push to expand international reporting beyond the traditional foreign correspondent model and appeal to more online readers. But whether these new models will prove as durable as the traditional one depends on factors that foreign desks didn't have to worry about in the past: Can they draw a strong, sustainable audience? And can they play a part in resolving the economic crisis that has caused so many mainstream organizations to axe their foreign bureaus?

Shuttered bureaus

Between 1998 and 2011, at least 20 US newspapers and other media outlets eliminated all their foreign bureaus, according to *American Journalism Review* (AJR). Elsewhere, the number and size of those bureaus have shrunk dramatically.

Among newspapers, *The Wall Street Journal* still has the largest international reporting division, with correspondents in 49 countries, followed by *The New York Times*. Wire services are much larger. The Associated Press has correspondents in over a hundred countries, while Bloomberg has correspondents in 73 countries.

The Washington Post currently has 21 foreign correspondents in 15 countries. That's down from a time, 15 years or so ago, when the paper kept 20 bureaus staffed across the globe. But the international staff is no longer limited to correspondents based in foreign bureaus. In the mid-2000s, as many newsrooms sought new ways to engage online audiences, the *Post* hired videojournalist Travis Fox for a new kind of Web-only foreign reporting—new at least for a traditional newspaper.

Fox traveled around the world producing long, feature-length pieces for the Web. His stories were fully reported, beautifully shot videos. Such work is costly to sustain, though, and like many other print organizations experiment-

Post correspondents were encouraged to contribute to the new blog. But not many leaped at the idea. "I felt some skepticism about writing for the foreign blog at first," said Kathy Lally, the *Post*'s bureau chief in Moscow at that time. "Not philosophical questions but practical ones: How much time it would require was the main question."

Lally's reaction has been a common one wherever mainstream media have informed staff reporters—including foreign correspondents—that their jobs now included writing for the Web. The push to move from a legacy schedule to a 24/7 one inevitably meets resistance. "The habits and traditions built over a century and a half of putting out the paper are a powerful, conservative force as we transition to digital," noted an internal *New York Times* report on newsroom innovation that was leaked last year.

In its earliest days, the *Post*'s foreign news blog depended on fairly sporadic field reports, supplemented by Web producers working in Washington. It was not the most auspicious start. But that changed with the arrival of Max Fisher, the blog's first full-time staff writer, in September of 2012 just a month before the experimental blog was to officially launch as WorldViews. Fisher had never been a foreign correspondent and did not travel for his pieces, but he wrote daily about breaking news abroad. His sources included *Post* foreign correspondents, as well as other news sites, social media, and video from public sources like YouTube.

Fisher developed a facility for synthesizing analysis from public data and previously reported stories—all while remaining in Washington. The result could be both serious and entertaining, like debunking widespread rumors that Kim Jong Un had fed his uncle to hungry dogs. Although at times sensational and occasionally controversial, Fisher probably became best known for explainer posts like "40 maps that explain the world," which were drawing a tremendous number of readers to the blog, and thus, to *The Washington Post*. In 2013, the *Post* had over 50 blogs, and WorldViews ranked among the top five in pageviews. Fisher left the *Post* in 2014, but now the blog has two full-time writers. "The conversational, explanatory tone that WorldViews employs has proven to be enormously appealing, by being timely, smart, and fun, all at the same time," said foreign editor Jehl, who worked as a traditional correspondent for 19 years, reporting from more than 40 countries. Jehl tells his correspondents that there is not much difference between what they've done



ing with video, the *Post* determined the cost was not yielding the advertising or the online audience it had expected. After Fox's departure in December of 2009, wire services became the main source of video for foreign stories on the *Post*'s website, with some contributions from the paper's own correspondents in the field.

Enter the blog

By 2012 online innovators at mainstream media were focused on blogs as a key to attracting new audiences looking for specialized material or faster dispatches on breaking news. The *Post* and other big newspaper websites were hosting dozens of blogs on a wide range of topics. The international blog that eventually became WorldViews began in 2012. "We wanted to offer readers an opportunity to consume foreign news in a different way," said Douglas Jehl, the paper's foreign editor, "one intended to complement the remarkable work being delivered by our foreign correspondents."

traditionally and what the blog demands: short pieces told with a distinctive voice.

At the heart of the digital transition, though, is this essential factor in building a global audience: speed. In the past, a foreign correspondent typically faced one daily deadline. Today, the idea of having an entire day to report a breaking news story sounds luxurious, as then-Moscow correspondent Lally explained in an email interview in April 2014. “The other day I covered Vladimir Putin’s annual televised, phone-in question-and-answer session with the Russian nation,” she wrote. “It went on for four hours. I filed a short story after the first hour and missed some things he was saying while I was writing and filing.”

Lally went on to write the main story that led the *Post*’s website and the next day’s paper. Meanwhile, the WorldViews blog published even more dispatches, covering both the quirky and the newsy items of the speech in close to real time. These were written by WorldViews bloggers in Washington with email feeds from Lally in Moscow. On a breaking news story, that kind of multiple filing, by both Lally and the bloggers, is essential to grab readers who want to know, right now, what’s happening. The blog offers a platform to publish a story, even if it’s still fragmented and developing.

When Israel launched airstrikes near Damascus in May 2013, YouTube videos became a primary and immediate source for news. In the old newspaper model, the *Post* and other publications would have worked on a story about this attack for the next day’s edition. But in the hybrid newspaper-digital model of today, the *Post*’s Beirut bureau put together a story that incorporated the YouTube video, which was already widely circulating on Twitter, added some reporting context, and posted it within hours.

The increased emphasis on speed evokes fears among traditional newsroom editors, who see the need to file and publish fast as a challenge to accuracy. It doesn’t have to be. A successful news operation can post a sentence or few paragraphs of news based on what the reporter knows and then gradually add to it throughout the day. It’s what wire services have done for decades—though today, in traditional print newsrooms, it’s known as digital-first reporting.

Over time, the *Post*’s foreign correspondents have become more active contributors to WorldViews. Almost all embrace the opportunity the blog offers to tell stories in a more informal voice. Or they may pass on ideas for stories that are big news in the countries they cover.

The *Post*’s Sudarsan Raghavan’s stories describing wars and conflicts from Sana’a to Baghdad have appeared on the front pages of *The Washington Post* many times. But in a blog post following the harrowing Nairobi Mall attack in September 2013, he wrote for WorldViews in the first person, connecting with readers on a personal level, while still describing the horror on the ground—a combination that the traditional article format doesn’t allow.

Defining the future

In 2014, when Will Englund was covering the Maidan anti-government protests in Ukraine, the *Post* asked him to capture some video from the scene.

Englund is 61 and has a Pulitzer Prize for investigative reporting. He and Lally, his wife, shared the Moscow bureau job at the time, which included covering the unrest in Ukraine. Englund had done video before from Nagorno-Karabakh, site of a long-running conflict dating back to the Soviet era, but he was far from an experienced videographer.

In Kiev, he used a Canon point-and-shoot camera that the *Post* gives to all of its foreign correspondents. It helped, he said, that the Maidan square was “always extremely photogenic.” He filed the audio recording of his narration separately, and the sound and images were put together by one of the dozens of video editors the *Post* has hired in recent years. Englund’s video from Kiev conveyed the Maidan scene in a way that words alone could not.

Lally and Englund, who now work as *Post* editors in Washington, both became important contributors to WorldViews while they worked overseas. Still, both missed the “good old days” of traditional newspaper foreign correspondence. “It can be satisfying to be quick with a story, but it’s not terribly rewarding,” said Englund. “And being enslaved by the Web hugely reduces our ability to explore and dig and do the other acts essential to quality journalism.”

Englund suggested that the *Post* leave more international breaking news coverage to wire service reports, giving the paper’s foreign correspondents time to explore deeper stories. “I believe the *Post* would be more valuable, and readable, if it moved away from hourly hard news, rather than trying to stay on top of it,” he said.

The debate on the shape of the mainstream foreign desk in the digital era is ongoing. Right now, the *Post* and other newsrooms are working with a hybrid blend of traditional correspondents and in-house bloggers, urging them to cooperate and complement each other’s work to create a fresh, constantly updated foreign report. But even with the increased US and international audience drawn by WorldViews, it’s impossible to say whether this formula—or something not yet tried—will be the long-term foreign-desk model.

A recent move at *The New York Times* signaled a rethinking of the blog approach there. The paper ended or merged about half of its blogs in 2014, including two with an international focus: India Ink and The Lede. India Ink was less than three years old and relied on freelance contributions, as well as postings by the paper’s correspondents in the country. The Lede often focused on breaking international stories. Those are now being covered in Open Source, written by Robert Mackey, who previously wrote The Lede.

Open Source is akin to a blog, though the *Times* does not identify it as one, and Mackey’s reporting for it draws on social media updates from Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube videos. In an interview in June, *Times* assistant managing editor Ian Fisher said, “We’re going to continue to provide bloggy content with a more conversational tone. We’re just not going to do [it] as much in standard reverse-chronological blogs.”

The *Times*’ change may reflect a growing trend: Most digital readers find content through search and social, rather than by seeking out the homepage of dedicated platforms. Yet, even digitally native publications such as Quartz and Buzzfeed have launched features focused on India, and *The Wall Street*

Journal continues to maintain several of its international blogs, including ones that report on China and India.

These blog experiments are reminders that much in the world of digital media remains just that: experimentation. They are also evidence of just how much international reporting has evolved—from an era only a few years ago when the emphasis was on rich, resource-intensive multi-media storytelling, to a time when newsrooms are struggling to find less costly ways of engaging a wider audience to meet their advertising goals.

The digital natives

The statistics on closings of traditional foreign bureaus are grim, but they do not tell the whole story. Digitally native sites like GlobalPost, created in 2009 to cover international news for a largely US audience, have filled some of the gap. GlobalPost has over 50 correspondents filing regularly from around the world.

Over the past year or so, at least three other digital natives expanded their foreign news coverage: Huffington Post, BuzzFeed, and Vice, each of which has hired journalists whose role looks a lot like that of a traditional foreign correspondent.

Perhaps the most surprising of these newcomers is BuzzFeed, a site once known primarily for viral listicles. BuzzFeed's newly minted commitment to covering hard news from around the world has already made it a competitor, with in-depth reporting from Caracas, Kiev, and other hot spots last year. With more than 160 million unique visitors, BuzzFeed is among the top 10 most-visited news websites in the United States, though it's not clear how many of those visitors are reading the international dispatches. In mainstream newsrooms, some have treated the site's foray into foreign reporting with a certain disdain.

Peter Preston, former longtime editor of *The Guardian*, is one skeptic. "There's nothing wrong with angles, twists, listicles," he wrote in *The Guardian*. "If they encourage readers, that's great. If they make money, that's great too. But they are not salvation for battling reporters in the depths of Africa, doing stories that matter to them and their communities."

Preston's critique makes BuzzFeed's foreign desk sound almost as frivolous as its cat videos. It's not. When it announced it would cover foreign news, the site hired respected ex-Guardian Moscow correspondent Miriam Elder, who then recruited reporters to cover Egypt, Syria, Russia, Ukraine, and other current news centers. Following a fresh \$50 million investment in August, BuzzFeed announced its plans to open offices in Japan, Germany, Mexico, and India.

All of this begins to sound like new media copying legacy media—at the same time that legacy foreign desks are trying to adapt to the new world of digital. "I'm not sure there is much difference—at the end of the day, the reporting we do is a lot more traditional than I think a lot of people would expect," Miriam Elder told me. "It's about making and meeting sources, making phone calls, finding the news, breaking the news."

There are fundamental differences, of course. BuzzFeed began life as a purveyor of viral entertainment, and fluff and sensation still dominate its homepage (you're far more likely

to access its international reporting from your social feeds). But as a digital native, BuzzFeed definitely has an edge in solving the biggest conundrum in the new world of journalism: How do you attract an audience?

Social-friendly headlines are one key to audience engagement. The *Post* and other mainstream newsrooms are still catching up to BuzzFeed, Upworthy, and other digital natives that know how to maximize clicks and shares with head-turning headlines. The *Post* now shares detailed visual presentations with national and international correspondents, to show how lead-ins that read like social headlines can grab attention. ("Headlines are the new nut graf" is a line we at the *Post* hear frequently at digital workshops for our reporters.)

Also key is the need to rethink the traditional US newspaper definition of audience. With few exceptions, papers were local institutions, serving the community where they published. The internet lets us reach well beyond traditional print circulation areas, but it doesn't tell us how best to do that. "If we are going to continue to expand our readership, as we must do in a digital world, growing those national and international audience will be crucial to our success," said Jehl.

Again, digital natives like BuzzFeed may have a psychological advantage, at least, in their instinctive understanding that audiences are now global. That has led BuzzFeed to a new approach in assigning beats. Globalization and the internet mean that "someone who lives in an urban center in Russia or Uruguay or Vietnam can have more in common with each other than with other people in their own countries," said Elder. So instead of making all foreign beats based on geography, Elder has created some "thematic beats," like international women's rights. Women's correspondent Jina Moore literally travels the world to write about how women became players in Rwanda's politics, about Brazil's decision to pay reparations for maternal death, and about abuse in Iraqi prisons.

The thematic approach is key to engaging a broad global audience, said BuzzFeed deputy foreign editor Paul Hamilos, in an interview with Journalism.co.uk. "You're not going to grow a news organization if you only think of your English language readers in your home country," he said.

In the "good old days," mainstream outlets like *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* set the agenda for foreign news in the United States. In the digital era, their authority as agenda-setters is shared with others, and some of the digital natives may end up showing them important new paradigms for foreign reporting.

The newcomers still have a lot to prove, though. Their commitment to news, unlike that of mainstream media, is a new phenomenon. Will they still be in the foreign news business a decade from now? It's hard to say—just as it's impossible to predict the shape of the traditional newsroom's foreign desk 10 years down the road. **CJR**

ANUP KAPHLE is the digital foreign editor at The Washington Post. This story is a chapter in *The New Global Journalism: Foreign Correspondence in Transition*, a report from Columbia University's Tow Center for Digital Journalism.

Making it

Survival strategies of an online freelancer

BY MICHAEL MEYER

Kyle Chayka comes off as more practical than driven—capable of knowing his goals, reading an environment, and deciding what his next steps should be without a lot of emotion. ¶ A 26-year-old freelancer who makes his living writing online, Chayka's preternatural calm sets him apart from a crowd balancing the competitive pressure of writing for some of the best-known publications on the internet with the financial uncertainty of piecing together a living in a medium where flat fees often replace word rates. In the chaotic ecosystem of digital journalism, reported

material commonly fetches the same price as a lightly researched “take,” and even blue-chip publications pay embarrassingly little for a story. Yet Chayka will tell you that making a living this way is totally possible, that there is not only money but value in this line of work.

“People constantly express shock that I’m a full-time freelance journalist writing on the internet,” he told me when I approached him to ask about his career. “Someone’s got to do a story about how it’s not that bad.”

For Chayka and other winners in this economy, freelancing is both a career in its own right and a calculated risk, a bet wagered in the hopes of winning something better—whether that something is a staff job, a book deal, a larger professional network, a more prestigious beat, or some other means of advancement. The gamble is whether you can make enough money to survive in the near-term while producing work that’s strong enough to significantly improve your professional standing. The task of today’s digital freelancer is to build a business and grow as a writer in an environment where pay rates don’t seem to amount to a living wage.

Chayka has placed his bet. His end game is more about rising in the profession than it is about money. He is hardly the first young journalist to take the popular notion that writers should be a brand and a business seriously. It’s his degree of comfort with the equation that makes him notable.

In a recent Twitter conversation between freelancers bemoaning low rates, Chayka sounded more like an

encouraging journalism school professor than a young writer. After listing a few bits of practical advice (“If the hourly rate it’ll take to do a piece doesn’t work out for money or bylines, don’t do it”), he concluded: “Treat writing like a business, because that’s what it is until you have the luxury of pretending it’s not.”

But what kind of business? The internet, with its voracious hunger for content and dubious moneymaking potential, has led to a glut of copy that has kept pay rates low. The fact that there are multiple databases devoted to uncovering which online publications pay writers at all is a good indication of the financial uncertainty facing digital freelancers.

Yet for Chayka and others working primarily or entirely online, the internet has also created a niche that is profitable in more than monetary terms. An example of this complex calculus is Chayka’s work for the tech site Gizmodo. The site isn’t going to make a freelancer rich. Who Pays Writers says it pays \$250 for a guest post, though Chayka wouldn’t share his rate. But it has the added appeal of being read widely by tech editors. Chayka wrote a story about online chat rooms for the site in December. Within a half hour, three editors had emailed to ask him for pitches.

The experience highlights the blurry line between exposure and connections. For freelancers, building an audience has fewer immediate benefits than exposure to editors, which is how visibility is truly monetized.

A lot of writers fail to make this calculation, Chayka says. “You can’t really talk about freelancing on the Web without

addressing the fact that there's such a disparity between the high end and the low end. It's not just in terms of pay. It's in terms of visibility and promotion and the value you're getting from the publication itself."

For Chayka, the payoff for visibility has been becoming a go-to freelancer for larger, better-paying sites such as The Daily Beast when those publications need a post on a trending topic. A freelancer who can give a site something it wants and doesn't have the time to shop around for is in a good negotiating position. When you're working at the lower end of the pay scale, a rate increase of \$100 or \$200 can make freelancing quickly more sustainable over the long haul.

Given that he's running a business, Chayka won't reveal his revenues. What he will say is that he makes a good enough living writing an average of 13 stories a month to put him in the salary range of a staff writer at many of the publications he writes for, which amounts to something between \$35,000 and \$65,000 a year. He pays \$900 a month to share an apartment with three roommates in Bushwick, a rapidly gentrifying neighborhood in Brooklyn, where he also rents a co-working space for \$175 a month; he has basic health insurance through the New York health exchange. About four of his 13 monthly stories are for *Pacific Standard*, where he's on contract to post a weekly technology column throughout 2015. The remaining nine are either stories he's pitched or one-off assignments brought to him by editors. He can't predict how many stories will fall into either category in a given month, but he manages a consistent volume overall.

Part of the calculation made by any freelancer needing to earn a livable amount of money from a manageable amount of work is that heavy reporting, if respected, often doesn't command higher rates—or even reimbursement for expenses. In a survey of freelance investigative reporters released in February by Project Word, an arm of Investigative Reporters and Editors, 38 percent of respondents said that outlets "often" or "regularly" commissioned pieces without covering the expenses of reporting them. Another 31 percent said this happens "occasionally." Chayka finds feature writing for Web and print publications to be the most satisfying part of what he does, but he has to buy the time to do them by churning out a higher volume of "one-thought 800-word pieces." His body of work includes, "Why every real man carries a tote bag," which appeared in *The Guardian* last September, and "Is FOMO Driving the Bitcoin Boom?" for *Pacific Standard* in December 2013. The relative effort that goes into these pieces is small enough that he thinks they often pay better, in the end, than labor intensive feature writing at higher rates.

"It's a funny calculation you have to make as a freelancer between who you're reaching, how much you can get paid,

what you can produce. All of those variables change for every piece you write," he told me.

There's no comprehensive data about Web pay rates for professional journalism, but the website Who Pays Writers gives a good sense of the low end of the spectrum. It focuses mostly on online publications that pay between \$50 and \$250 for a piece, and reveals vast differences between companies commingling at that end of the pay scale. VICE, valued at \$2.5 billion, paid \$500 for a 2,000- to 4,000-word "investigative" feature in 2014, according to Who Pays Writers. A tiny operation like The Awl typically pays \$100 to \$200 for a story, which is competitive with the rates offered freelancers by Web giants like *The Atlantic*. *The New Yorker*'s website pays most freelancers who cold pitch \$250 for a reported piece; the Gawker network of sites pays about the same. The fees are always round numbers, and give you the

'People constantly express shock that I make a living as a freelance journalist writing on the internet. Someone's got to do a story about how it's not that bad.'

sense that they were carved out from a budget by editors who didn't want to bother with any complex accounting.

I spoke to a number of established freelancers for this story. Their answers to the question of whether freelancing for the Web was a viable way to make a living ranged from positive ("I make a pretty good living") to tentative ("it's pretty challenging, I must admit") to despondent ("there is no way you can survive on just writing online").

What's clear is that even excellent writers with established reputations on the Web have to work very hard to make a living in this environment. The Gawker writer-turned-freelancer Michelle Dean wrote in 2013 that she worked 10 to 12 hours a day, seven days a week to earn her living writing for the Web. Jacob Silverman, who has written online for *Politico Magazine* and *Slate*, jokes with his wife that, "I don't really make money. I just occasionally win money." His three-day winning streak as a guest on *Jeopardy!* earned him most of his income in 2012. His latest win was a book deal, allowing him to escape the high volume demands of writing for the Web for a while.

Some feel that freelancing is a perpetual tryout for a staff job, and that it's becoming the industry's new version of the unpaid internship, throwing up a similar barrier to entry for those trying to get into the profession without a parental



'There is and probably always will be money in journalism. The question is, where is it?'

subsidy. "Someone who's working two jobs isn't necessarily going to have the time to pop out a really great piece for \$150 to build their career," Manjula Martin, founder of Who Pays Writers, points out. Chayka has managed to support himself through writing since college, but being his own boss doesn't mean he can grant himself paid sick leave.

Online freelancing has the feel of a young person's game. But Steve Friess, a 42-year-old freelancer based in Ann Arbor, makes a six-figure income writing reported stories for the Web—often for newer entrants like Al Jazeera America and Take Part, a site recently launched by the film production company Participant Media. "There is and probably always will be money in journalism," Friess says. "The question is, where is it? And that moves. You sniff out where the money is at the moment, and you go there, and you accept the notion that a year from now they'll probably run out of money, and you'll have to find other places. And this process of moving from one grazing field to another has certainly always been my experience as a freelancer."

He says his own key to financial success as a freelancer comes from his newspaper days. He can write quickly and well on many topics. Although he says he's generally well above the \$250-an-article range, volume is still the key to making an income writing on the Web. He wrote anywhere from 10 to 20 stories a month in 2014, including multiple features.

Chayka became a full-time freelancer in 2012, after leaving his job as associate editor at ARTINFO. It took him about six months to "stop freaking out" about whether he was going to make any money. But it took a full year and a half to gain confidence that he could produce ambitious work while paying the bills. That's arguably his greatest strength as a freelancer—a talent for indulging his interests while still earning enough to support his larger ambitions.

It certainly helps that his interests often center on the Web itself. In December 2013, he produced a massive viral hit for The Verge by tracking down the owners of the Shiba Inu dogs currently starring in Doge, that season's hottest internet meme. (People found pictures of Shiba Inus and added captions expressing the dogs' internal monologues in Comic Sans type.)

Chayka's skill at covering some of the lighter aspects of technology and culture has bought him time to pursue more ambitious journalism. In April of 2014, he wrote a *Newsweek* cover story on biometric surveillance.

The benefit of treating writing as a business is that the days you'd rather forget helped finance your proudest achievements. The tradeoff is that efficiency often wins out over craft. When I called Chayka's longtime editor at *Pacific*

Standard, Nicholas Jackson, to talk about his work, one of the highest compliments Jackson could manage centered on Chayka's lack of perfectionism. Jackson explained that, on the occasion when a draft Chayka files needs more work than Jackson has time for, he's able to say, "We're only going to be able to get it to a place where we both think it's good enough but maybe not as great as you originally imagined, but I've got to move on to the next thing. Hope you're okay with that." He is. It's one of the things "that make you want to just keep working with somebody," said Jackson, who had 18 drafts waiting in his inbox as we spoke.

As successful as Chayka has been at finding his way in the wilds of freelance digital journalism, his ultimate goal lies elsewhere. He's better than any writer I've spoken to at battling down the anxieties that come with balancing craft and commerce, but that doesn't mean he's content to stay in his current niche forever.

"No one wants to be forced to churn out stuff for money," he says. "I think everyone would be better off if time and space and money allowed more online writers to put more thought into their work."

The Web has given him a solid niche for his business. But, as in any business, the key metric of success is growth. And Web freelance rates only afford so much opportunity for growth. Long online features are becoming more common and starting to pay better, with outlets like Matter paying rates competitive with high-end magazines. But print remains the place to go if you want to hone your skills as a writer and get paid for it, Chayka believes.

"It definitely feels a little weird to be aspiring towards something that's arguably less stable than internet media," he says. "But as a writer and as someone who wants to be a more literary writer, print magazines are still the place that you go to kind of stretch out. I think that transition to Web features being just as respected as print features is happening, but we're definitely not there yet."

Talking with Chayka, I was struck by how hard it is, in an industry undergoing constant change, to know how much of our comfort with present circumstances is based solely on our optimism about the future. Nowhere is this truer than among freelancers, who consider their prospects not only in terms of years but also in terms of the assignment that must appear tomorrow. Chayka is an optimist. He believes he's going to be working tomorrow for better rates than he worked for today. He believes his native medium will continue to grow to meet his ambitions. He believes it's a good time to do business. **CJR**

MICHAEL MEYER is a senior writer for CJR.

Revolt of the clerks

Even a peon can mastermind a devastating leak

BY CLAY SHIRKY

*This is an excerpt from the forthcoming book,
Journalism After Snowden: The Future of Free Press in the Surveillance State*

Edward Snowden's revelations about the conduct of the NSA don't just tell us about the past conduct of the government. They tell us something about the future of political journalism. In light of the extraordinary pressure on *New York Times* reporter James Risen to reveal his sources, and significant movements to restrict journalistic reporting of leaks by the Obama Administration, it's clear the stories that arose from Snowden's leak have moved journalistic coverage of the world's governments, already a fraught endeavor, into a new and more contentious phase.

Before Snowden, we saw the distribution of video and cables from the US State Department, leaked by Chelsea (then Bradley) Manning. That was an extraordinary occurrence, but one of such strangeness—the scale, the involvement of Julian Assange, Manning's own military history—that it was impossible to know which aspects of that leak were singular occurrences and which indicated larger patterns.

Snowden, a far more knowledgeable and confident source than Manning, and holding far more significant material, has made some of those patterns visible. The leak of the NSA documents provides much information about political journalism in a networked age. The most important patterns are these: Individual sources have improved leverage, transnational news networks are becoming both essential and normal, and digital data is undermining older patterns of journalistic reputation.

Taken together, these changes disrupt the unstated bargain between governments and news outlets. In all but the most extraordinary cases, national news has been published in national outlets, with the borders of reporting, national interest, and national jurisdiction all lining up. After Snowden, that pattern is shredded. As journalistic outlets become more networked, the familiar geographic link between sources, reporters, publications, and subjects will weaken.

The open issue for the world's investigative journalists is how far the world's governments will go to restrict these networks. The threat of relatively unconstrained reporting of

secrets has prompted extra-judicial attacks on publishing outlets, as with suspension of credit card payments to WikiLeaks following Congressional complaint. (Full disclosure: I am a supporter of WikiLeaks, both as a philosophical matter and as a donor during the period in which its finances were first under attack. I am also a donor to ProPublica and *The Guardian*, in large part because of their role in preventing the US from limiting publication of the Snowden revelations.)

We are quite accustomed to autocratic governments like Saudi Arabia and Egypt hampering journalism, but with the rising threat of real transnational reporting, we are seeing authoritarian leaders in South Korea and Turkey push for control of media. Even governments with a constitutional commitment to freedom of speech and of the press, such as the UK and US, have attempted to create de facto restrictions on publishing where the law allows them no direct relief. The essential question is how journalists and publications can strengthen their ability to report important news in an age of increasing interference.

THERE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN LEAKS AND LEAKERS. ANY DISCUSSION of journalism in the US will eventually come around to Watergate and Deep Throat, the code name for Mark Felt, associate director of the FBI and leaker-in-chief. Likewise, digital data made leaking easier long before Snowden; the site Cryptome.org was set up in 1996 to do much of what WikiLeaks also does, and WikiLeaks itself was roiling national

politics long before Manning ever showed up, as with its accusations of corruption by Daniel arap Moi in 2007.

The Manning case, though, was unusual: a massive leak from inside a secured network run by the richest country on earth, one seemingly well equipped to guard its own secrets. It concerned the United States, the world's sole superpower and most important global actor. And Manning, visibly upset with US conduct and on disciplinary probation, was only allowed continued access because the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan increased the need for technical talent while decreasing the supply.

The cumulative effect was to make the revelations of 2010 seem as if they might be a one-off, rather than a new pattern. Many people commenting on the Manning leak believed that nothing of that magnitude would happen again. This assumption rested on the conviction that national governments and large firms would quickly find ways to limit access to their secrets by insiders who might be willing to leak that information.

In large bureaucracies, the scarcest resource is not access to data, but individual bravery.

The Snowden leak shows us that this organizational adaptation did not happen. The National Security Agency is among the best-funded and most competent group of electronic spies in the world. It had three years after the example set by Manning to limit possible leaks, and it failed, spectacularly. Not only did the agency lose a huge trove of data, officials could not initially identify who had leaked it and, if they are to be believed, still cannot use their own internal controls to discover which documents Snowden had in his possession when he left.

If the NSA cannot secure its own documents, what hope is there for less competent institutions? All large institutions with secrets now face a serious threat to their current practices in making use of digital data (exactly as Assange predicted they would back in 2006.) The value of freeing information from physical containers is that more people can see and use it simultaneously, at lower cost. This is a boon for almost every possible use of this data, but it is in tension with any desire to keep it secret.

This tension is fundamental. Sharing data widely is the principal source of risk to its secrecy, but making secret data harder to share also makes it harder to use, and thus less

valuable. This dilemma grows more severe the more is to be kept secret, because large stores of data require increasingly automated processes of indexing and linking, which in turn require reducing barriers between data stores, so as to "connect the dots." And all this hoped-for dot-connecting requires scores of junior analysts and administrators just to manage basic operations.

From a bureaucratic point of view, there are three obvious solutions to this problem: immediate restrictions on system access for anyone skeptical about the mission; dramatic limits on the number of junior employees given access; and total internal surveillance. Acting on these solutions would indeed lower the number of leaks, but would leave an organization trying to use vast datasets with a skeleton crew of paranoid yes-men, hardly a recipe for effective organizational action.

Some bureaucracies will indeed subject themselves to dramatically increased degrees of internal paranoia over who is to have access to which pieces of data, but most won't, and the ones that do will find that it hampers their effectiveness.

Just as people write down their nominally secret passwords on Post-Its, organizations will re-open their databases to competent administrators and entry-level analysts, because they will have to if they want to make use of the information.

Bureaucracies are permanently vulnerable to a revolt of the clerks. The increased value of digital data comes almost entirely from its improved shareability, and if data is more shareable, there is a greater risk that it will be shared. In a digital world, it no longer takes a senior figure like Mark Felt

to leak; it can be anyone who has access to the data. For all Snowden's genius, he operated far from the levers of power within his organization.

What Snowden (and Manning) show is that in large bureaucracies, the scarcest resource is not access to data, but individual bravery. Brave sources are rare but not vanishingly so; a brave source can accomplish the delivery of information on a scale unimaginable even a decade ago.

ONE CURIOSITY OF THE HALF-MILLENNIUM SINCE GUTENBERG, and especially of those hundred years in which the telegraph, photograph, phonograph, telephone, cinema, radio, and television all appeared, is that for all the innovation, media remained relentlessly national, constrained by local economics and politics.

For physical media—books and newspapers, letters and photographs—international tariffs priced out much border crossing. The cost of building out the infrastructure for the telegraph and later the telephone had the same effect. Even radio and TV, transported as pure energy, first appeared when broadcast engineering was barely adequate to cover a

whole city, much less cross national boundaries. Even border-spanning news organizations such as the BBC had to set themselves up country by country.

Through the end of the 20th century, leaks of any importance would be leaked to, and published by, the press in that nation. Profumo was reported in England, Watergate in the US, and so on. Even as entertainment became more global, the news (especially political news) remained nationally sourced, nationally published, and nationally consumed.

Here, too, there are historical precedents before Snowden. It is no exaggeration to say that the current pope got his mitre in part because of *The Boston Globe's* coverage of child sexual abuse by priests. *The Globe* published its series on the horror of Father John Geogahn's crimes in 2002, just far enough into the internet's existence for the story to spread outside the US, sparking international scrutiny. Similarly, *The Guardian's* correspondent in South Africa told me later in that decade that he had regarded his job as reporting on South Africa to the UK, but had recently discovered that his South African audience was now larger than his British one. *The Guardian* website had become a platform that allowed South Africans to read about themselves.

Those were 21st-century equivalents of the first English bibles being printed in Antwerp: a way of placing a single publisher out of the reach of the target nation's government. What's different today is the "multiple publishers" strategy that Assange improvised and Snowden extended, akin to insisting that every synagogue have two Torahs or every database store information in multiple locations. Having more than one copy of the leaked data and more than one publication working on the story makes the leak more effective.

After Manning, it was easy to believe that organizations like WikiLeaks were the hinge on which any such leak would depend. In the aftermath of the State Department leak, Assange rather than Manning was presented as the central figure, not least because he was charismatic, brilliant, and odd—catnip for the press. Given his outsized presence, it was easy to believe that there had to be some organization between the leaker and the press to make any system of international distribution work.

After Snowden, we see how much power now lies with the leaker. Snowden demonstrated that the principle value WikiLeaks had provided was not in receiving the source materials, but in coordinating a multi-national network of publishers. Snowden himself took on this function, contacting Laura Poitras and Glenn Greenwald directly.

The potential for a global news network has existed for a few decades, but its practical implementation is unfolding in ours. This normalization of trans-national reporting networks reduces the risk of what engineers call a "single point of failure." As we saw with Bill Keller's craven decision not to publish James Risen's work on the NSA in 2004, neither the importance of a piece of political news nor its existence as a scoop is enough to guarantee that that it will actually see the light of day. The global part is driven by the need for leakers to move their materials outside national jurisdictions.

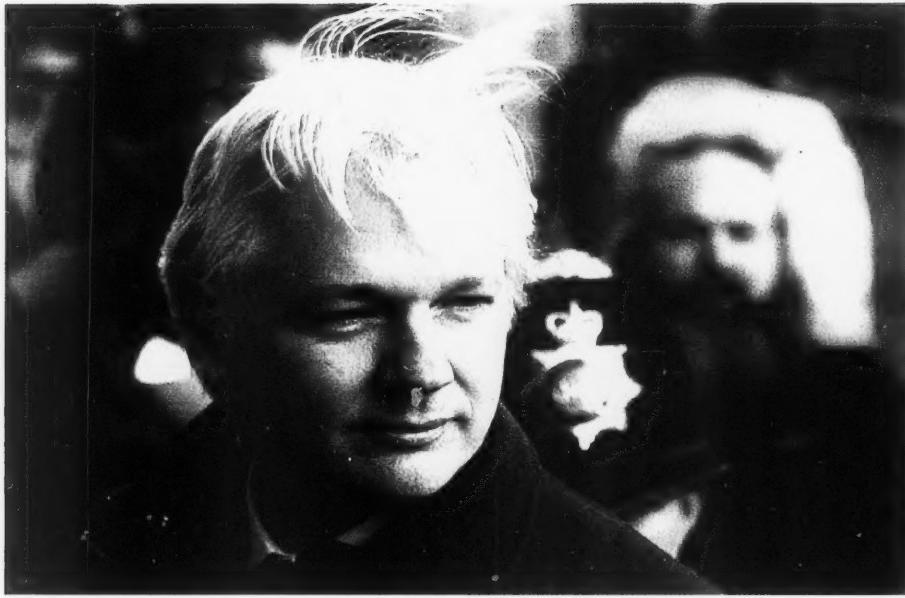
The network part is driven by the advantages of having more than one organization with a stake in publication.

The geographic spread of the information means that there is no one legal regime in which injunctions on publication can be served, while the balance of competition and collaboration between organizations removes the risk of an editor unilaterally killing newsworthy coverage. Now and for the foreseeable future, the likelihood that a leak will appear in a single publication, in the country in which it is most relevant, will be in inverse proportion to the leak's importance.

THESE TWO CHANGES—THE HEIGHTENED LEVERAGE OF sources and the normalization of trans-national news networks—are threatening even to democratic states with constitutional protections for the press (whether de jure, as in the US, or de facto, as in the UK). Those governments always had significant extra-legal mechanisms for controlling leaks at their disposal, but empowered sources and transnational networks threaten those mechanisms.

New age After Edward Snowden, we see how much power now lies with the leaker.





Here, kitty Julian Assange, not Bradley Manning, was presented as the central figure in the State Department leak. He was charismatic, brilliant, and odd—catnip for the press.

This containment of journalistic outlets inside national borders resembled a version of the Prisoner's Dilemma, a social science thought-experiment in which each of two people is given a strong incentive to pursue significant short-term gain at the other's expense. At the same time, each participant has a weaker but longer-lasting incentive to create small but mutual, longer-term value. The key to the Prisoner's Dilemma is what Robert Axelrod, its original theorist, calls "The Shadow of the Future." The shadow of the future is what keeps people cooperating over the long term—in friendships, businesses, marriages, and other relationships—despite the temptations of short-term defection of all sorts.

News outlets and governments exist in a version of the Prisoner's Dilemma. Publications have a short-term incentive to publish everything they know, but a long-term incentive to retain access to sources inside the government. Governments have a short-term incentive to prevent news outlets from discovering or publishing anything, but a long-term incentive to be able to bargain for softening, delaying, or killing the stories they really don't want to see in public (as happened with Keller).

So long as both institutions have a long time horizon, neither side gets all of what it wants, but neither side suffers the worst of what it fears, and the relationship bumps along, year after year. (There have been a few counter-examples: I.F. Stone did all his work for his weekly newsletter by researching government data, never interviewing politicians or civil servants. He reasoned that the quid pro quo of increased access but reduced ability to publish would end up creating more restrictions than it was worth.)

The shadow of the future has meant that even in nations with significant legal protections for free speech, the press' behavior is considerably constrained by mutual long-term bargains with the government. Empowered leakers and

transnational publication networks disrupt this relationship. A leaker with a single issue—the world should see what the State Department or the NSA are doing, to take the two obvious examples—has no regard for the shadow of the future, while publications outside the US will be not be constrained by legal challenges, threatened loss of insider access, or appeals to patriotism.

THERE IS ONE FINAL PATTERN THAT THE SNOWDEN LEAKS make visible. In the middle of the 20th century, mainstream news both relied on and produced cultural consensus. With the erosion of the belief that mainstream media speaks to and for the general public in an unbiased way, the presumed lack of objectivity of any given news organization has become a central concern. Alongside this change, however, we are witnessing the spread of a new form of objective reporting: reporting done by objects.

There are, of course, precedents to object-based reporting; tape-recorded conversations in Nixon's White House ended his presidency, as his foul-mouthed, petty vindictiveness became obvious to all. The heroic work of *The Washington Post* is the stuff of journalistic lore, but the mechanical nature of the tape recorders actually made them the most trusted reporters on the story.

As the quality and range of reporting by objects has increased, it has had the curious effect of making the partisan nature of both reporters and publications a less serious issue. If *Mother Jones*, predictably liberal, had only been able to report Mitt Romney's remarks about the 47 percent because a bartender heard and repeated them, the story would have circulated among the magazine's left-leaning readers, but no farther (as with most stories in that publication). That bartender recorded the conversation, however, and the fact of the recording meant *Mother Jones'* reputation didn't become

a serious point of contention. Because people only had to trust the recording, not the publication, the veracity of the remarks was never seriously challenged.

This pattern of objective recording trumping partisan reputation is relatively new. Indeed, in the 47 percent story, otherwise sophisticated political observers like Jonathan Chait predicted that Romney's remarks would have little real effect, because they didn't understand that the existence of a recording simply neutralized much of the "out of context" and "he said, she said" posturing that usually follows. *Mother Jones* no longer had to be mainstream to create a mainstream story, provided its accuracy was vouched for by the bartender's camera.

In Snowden's case, many of the early revelations about the NSA, and especially the wholesale copying of data flowing through various telecom networks, had already been reported, but that reporting had surprisingly little effect. The facts of the matter weren't enough to alter the public conversation. What did have an effect was seeing the documents themselves.

All inter-office PowerPoint decks are bad, but no one does them as poorly as the federal government. The slides describing the Prism program were unfakeably ugly, visibly made by insiders talking to insiders. As with Romney's remark about the 47 percent, the NSA never made a serious attempt to deny the accuracy of the leak or cast aspersions on the source, the reporters, or the publications.

Like the Nixon tapes and the Romney video, the existence of the Snowden documents also gave Glenn Greenwald, one of the most liberal journalists working today, a bulwark against charges of partisan fabrication. Indeed, he didn't just publish his work in *The Guardian*, a liberal UK-based paper; he took the data with him to a startup, The Intercept, believing (correctly) that the documents themselves would act as a kind of portable and surrogate reputation, disarming attempts by the government or partisans elsewhere to deny the accuracy of present or future stories generated from those documents.

In past leaks—the Pentagon Papers, Watergate—it took the combined force of leaked information and a mainstream publication to get the public's attention, and mainstream publications were, almost by definition, the publications most invested in the shadow of the future. Meanwhile, more partisan publications of the 20th century were regarded with suspicion; even accurate reporting that appeared in them rarely went beyond niche audiences. After Snowden, the world's governments are often denied even this defense. This creates a novel set of actors: an international partisan press that will be trusted by the broad public, so long as it traffics in documents that announce their own authenticity.

THERE WILL BE MORE SNOWDEN-STYLE LEAKS, BECAUSE the number of people with access to vital information has proliferated and cannot easily be reduced. Even one-in-a-million odds of a leak start to look likely if a million people have access, as was the case with the State Department's cables. So what should journalists and publications do to maximize their ability to report newsworthy stories and minimize government interference? Three broad skills are required.

First and most importantly, reporters have to get good at encrypted communication. (It would be useful if news

organizations began encrypting even routine communication, to avoid signaling to the governments they cover when something particularly important is happening, and to provide cover to sensitive sources.) Encryption is not an IT function; individual reporters have to become comfortable sending and receiving encrypted email, at a minimum. And, as was the case with both Manning and Snowden, it's important to recognize—and to get the source to recognize—that encryption is no guarantee that a source won't eventually be identified. It is a tool for buying time, not guaranteeing anonymity.

Second, journalists and institutions in contact with leakers need to have a plan for involving other journalists or institutions located in a different jurisdiction. While the leaks that get the most attention are national scale, we can expect additional leaks from inside businesses and local governments. It may be valuable to have a New Jersey newspaper holding vital documents about a sheriff in Colorado, to make sure the Colorado paper can't be successfully pressured to withhold them. (This "doomsday switch" scenario seems to have been used by John McAfee, in his fight with the government of Belize, an indication that the pattern extends beyond journalism.)

And third, both journalists and publications should figure out to whom they might be useful as a third-party recipient of some other journalist's or publication's secrets. In moments of crisis (and important leaks tend to precipitate crises), those in need of backup will turn to people they already trust. If you are a journalist, editor, or publisher, ask yourself which other publications, anywhere in the world, would turn to you if they needed backup?

These leaks are far more threatening to secretive organizations when perpetrated by clerks instead of chiefs and distributed outside the bounds of local jurisdiction; they are also harder to question or deny. We are already seeing the world's democracies behave like autocratic governments in the face of this threat; the Obama administration has become the greatest enemy of press freedom in a generation (a judgment recently made by James Risen, the man whose NSA story Bill Keller quashed).

Leaks will still be relatively rare. But because they can happen at large scale, across transnational networks, and provide documents the public finds trustworthy, they allow publications some relief from extra-legal constraints on publishing material in the public interest.

Brave sources are going to require brave journalists and brave publications. They are also going to require lots of technical expertise on encryption among reporters and lots of cooperation among sometime competitors. The job of publications is to air information of public concern, and that is increasingly going to mean taking steps to ensure that no one government can prevent publication. Nothing says "We won't back down" like burning your boats on the beach. **CJR**

CLAY SHIRKY is an associate professor of journalism at New York University. This is a chapter from *Journalism After Snowden: The Future of Free Press in the Surveillance State*, a forthcoming book from Columbia University Press. The book is part of the Journalism After Snowden initiative, a yearlong series of events and projects from the Tow Center for Digital Journalism in collaboration with CJR. The initiative is funded by The Tow Foundation and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

Ideas + Reviews

ESSAY

Show, don't tell

In a disintermediated age, “performed journalism” brings audiences together

BY LENE BECH SILLESEN

On a November night last year, a group of journalists and artists gathered around a conference table backstage at the Davies Symphony Hall in San Francisco to toast their shared contribution to Pop-Up Magazine, which was scheduled to go live in half an hour. Not in the way that a digital magazine goes live, but in the most literal sense of the word: Live onstage, in front of an audience.

Senior editor Pat Walters thanked everyone for their hard work and sent around a bottle of Bulleit bourbon, which passed through the hands of over 20 contributors, including several print and radio reporters, documentary filmmakers, photographers, and a group of musicians.

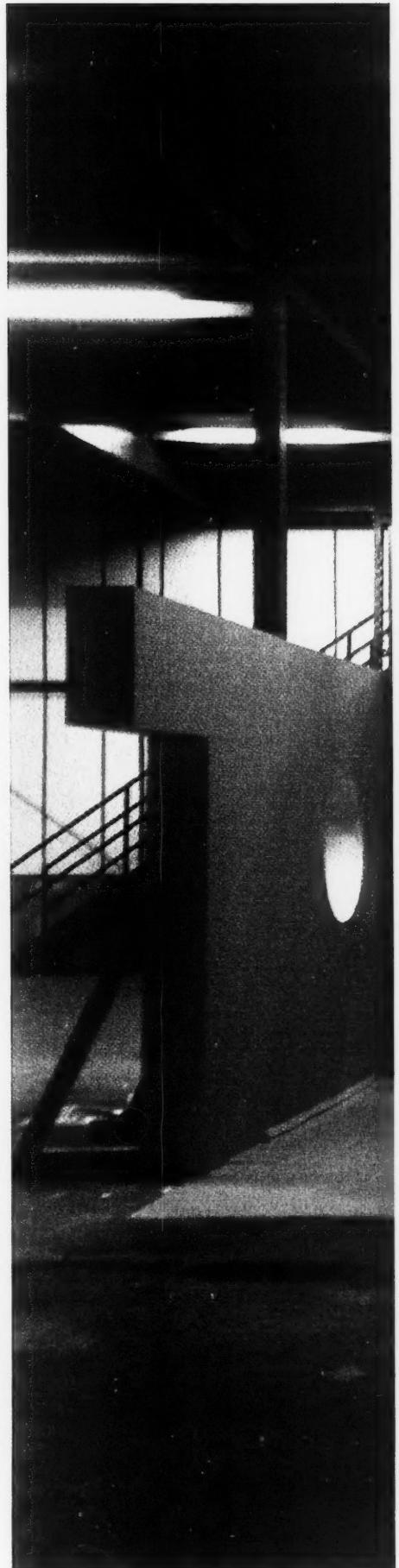
As a so-called “live magazine,” Pop-Up presents nonfiction stories narrated onstage. Long features follow shorter, front-of-book style pieces, all of which are organized into familiar categories such as op-ed, sports, and education. Before they’re performed, the stories’ titles and bylines are projected onto a screen.

Kiera Butler, senior editor of *Mother Jones*, had shaky hands and sweaty palms as she took the stage that night. Standing in front of a sold-out crowd of nearly 3,000, Butler told a story based on research for her just-published book about 4-H and American farming. Her Pop-Up piece profiled a young woman who puts herself through college by herding sheep. Butler’s narration was accompanied by sound clips of the girl in her barn, recorded by radio journalist Ike Sriskandarajah, and projected illustrations of sheep and shepherdesses by artist Evah Fan.

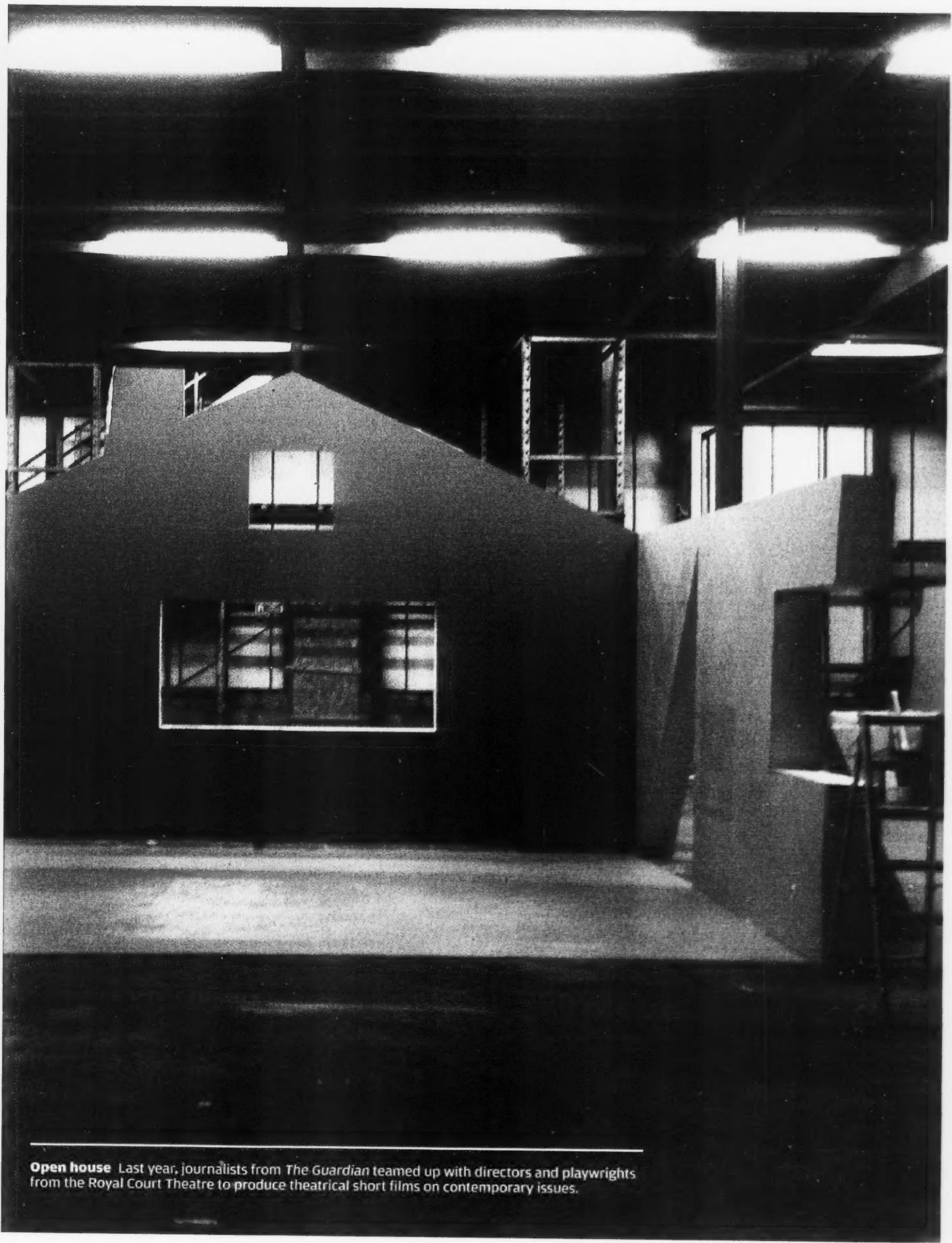
Butler, who’s used to working in solitude by the light of a computer screen, couldn’t see beyond the bright blur of the stage lights, but the noise from the audience echoed up to her. Sometimes she heard laughter, sometimes sympathetic *aaawwwws*, and sometimes she was surprised by which paragraphs really resonated with the audience. It felt like a supportive crowd, and Butler’s nervousness started to evaporate as the laughs multiplied.

Since it was founded in 2009, Pop-Up has been a huge success. Its shows routinely sell out, usually in under 30 minutes. In 2014, it spawned a monthly print publication, *The California Sunday Magazine*, and although Pop-Up started out as an informal experiment with no growth plan, both it and the print magazine are now part of a for-profit company. “Pop-Up more than supports itself,” says senior editor Walters, its only full-time employee, who won’t discuss numbers.

As news media experiment with new digital content and platforms in attempts to build audience engagement around their brands and products, journalistic live shows such as Pop-Up offer a different lesson, one that seemingly has real potential. This expanding genre, which might be called “performed journalism,”



ANNE GREY SKOVDAL / COURTESY OF THE GUARDIAN



Open house Last year, journalists from *The Guardian* teamed up with directors and playwrights from the Royal Court Theatre to produce theatrical short films on contemporary issues.

uses the old and decidedly non-digital methods of the theater to draw people in. In some ways, these live shows fill the newspaper's historic role as a focal point for its community, a role that has faded as information sources have grown more diffuse.

When French political thinker Alexis de Tocqueville travelled to the United States in the 1830s, he was deeply impressed by how American society organized itself into voluntary communities. At a time when some 900 different printed papers made America the greatest newspaper country in the world, Tocqueville found that newspapers shaped communities by enabling collective thought and action. "Newspapers make associations, and associations make newspapers," he wrote in

Democracy in America. The paper was a tangible artifact that tied people together in a community of ideas and knowledge, and through the consumption of one coherent package of information, those who read the same paper knew the same information to be important.

While the press landscape started changing shortly after Tocqueville's visit, similar feelings of solidarity and community lingered around some newspapers. Cornell University professor emeritus Benedict Anderson has called newspaper consumption an "extraordinary mass ceremony" and noted that the German philosopher Hegel likened the newspaper to morning prayer. Although the ritual of reading the news is performed in privacy, each reader is well aware of

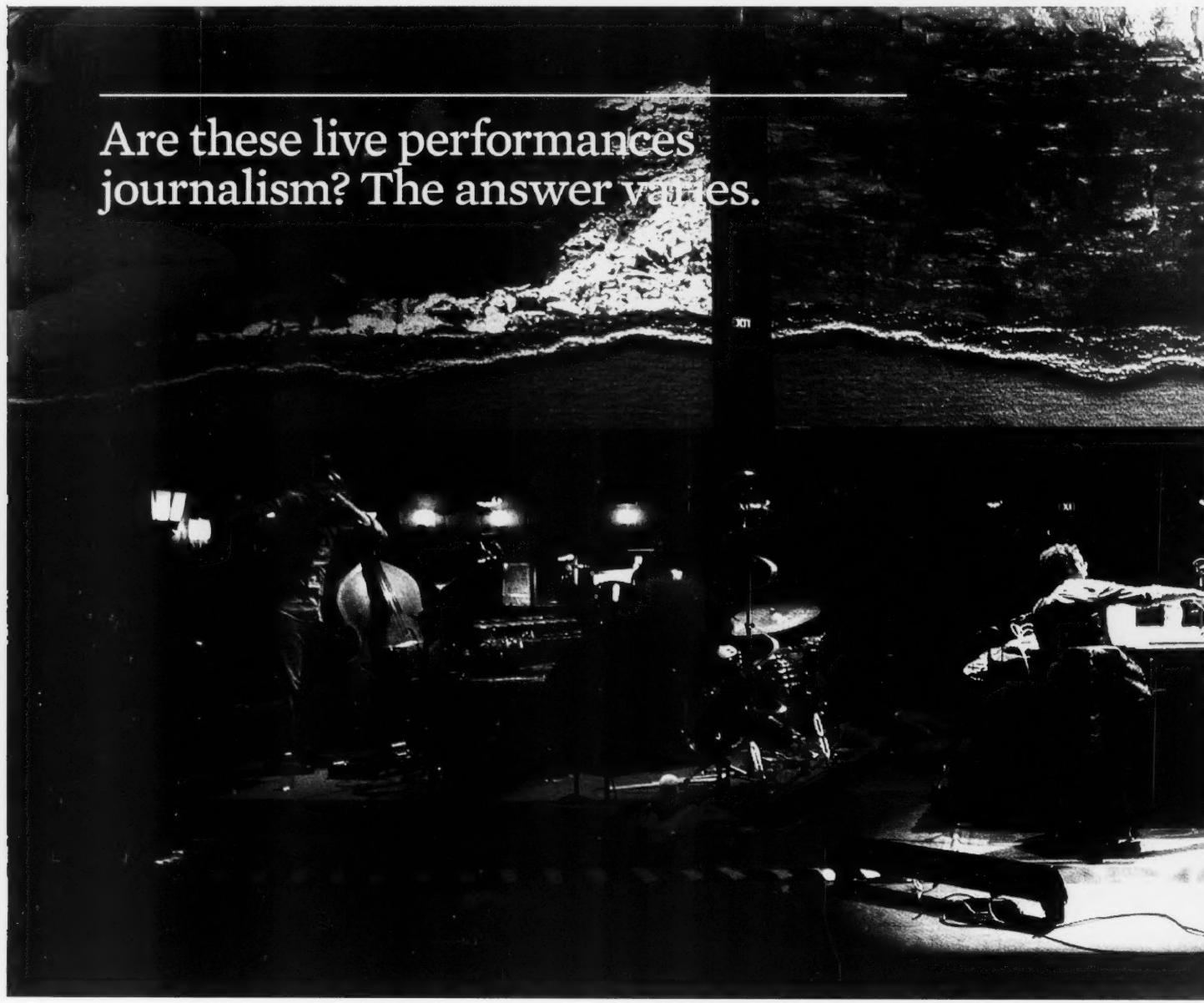
the numerous others out there, and is reminded of their existence in daily encounters around the neighborhood.

Today, journalism's role has radically changed. Information is scattered across digital platforms, where two people rarely read the same compilation of stories every day, and readers no longer feel as loyal to a particular news organization as they once did. The internet is not the only culprit. Newspapers started losing their ability to tie together communities when the commercialized, mainstream press began producing objective, disengaged news, rather than the opinionated and discussion-based coverage of Tocqueville's time.

Hybrids of journalism and theater fall into an expanding field of highly popular initiatives that stage non-fiction

MATTHEW SEPTIMUS / COURTESY OF RADIOLAB

Are these live performances journalism? The answer varies.



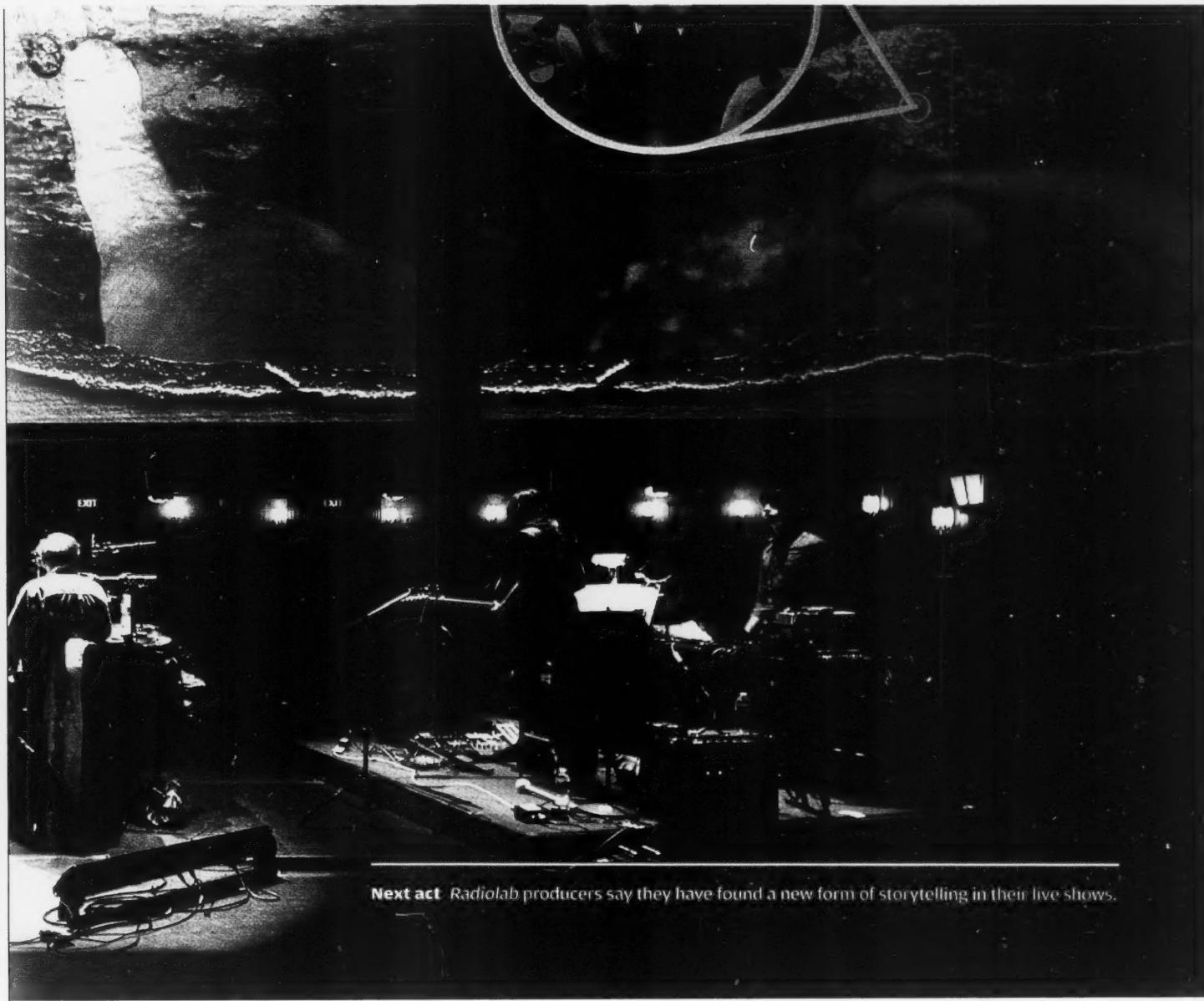
stories in engaging live performances, from The Moth—a stage show and podcast made up of personal stories told live onstage—to the conference series TED or the Aspen Ideas Festival. While Pop-Up is the only US-based live show of its kind, public radio shows and podcasts *This American Life* and *Radiolab* have produced successful, large-scale live shows with theatrical elements for years. In Europe, a Paris-based stage show, Live Magazine, and a similar show produced by Danish publisher of digital longform stories, Zetland, were both inspired by Pop-Up Magazine and have proved highly successful.

There's money in at least some of these variants. Events ranging from conferences to roundtable discussions and interviews take the bottom edge

off the black-hole budgets of many legacy publications, and have been heralded as potential saviors within the industry for years. *The Atlantic*'s event series reportedly made up almost one-fifth of the brand's total revenue as of last summer, and around 25 percent of The Texas Tribune's revenue comes from its festival, while *The New York Times* is expanding its lineup of staged interviews and talks. But these live events differ in important ways from the ambitious stage productions favored by Pop-Up, *Radiolab*, and *This American Life*.

Are these live performances journalism? In this experimental genre, the answer varies. For *Radiolab* and Pop-Up, the editorial process behind the shows resembles that of traditional journalistic

platforms. Stories are researched, fact-checked, and edited by professional journalists, editors, or producers. But other outlets are adapting journalism for the stage, and sometimes altering facts in the process. Last year, *The Guardian UK* collaborated with the British Royal Court Theatre to produce 10 filmed theatrical plays based on conversations between journalists, playwrights, and directors. The three- to 10-minute microplays are fictions adapted from fact. Yet on its website, *The Guardian* treats them like journalism, embedding links to the plays at the top of articles on related topics. "To us, they are as much a response to issues as journalists writing a feature," says Chris Wiegand, the stage editor of *The Guardian*, who coordinated the project.



Next act Radiolab producers say they have found a new form of storytelling in their live shows.

In June last year, *This American Life* staged its biggest live event ever at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. The editorial processes for the radio shows and their live counterparts are usually the same, but this time stories that had already aired on the radio became operas and musicals, and for the sake of adaptation, were changed slightly. "Probably 70 to 80 percent of what you're about to hear is verbatim quotes from interviews, the rest is artistic invention," host Ira Glass said onstage while introducing one of the stories.

Audiences are drawn to performed journalism because it is informative, entertaining, and emotionally engaging. At Pop-Up, for instance, the audience becomes a very real part of the magazine. Attendees and contributors have the opportunity to discuss the night's show in person at an after-party, which was a highlight for Butler of *Mother Jones*, who usually receives online reader feedback through comments that are often anonymous and sometimes insulting.

Pop-Up founder Douglas McGraw

calls the live magazine "social media." With a bit of creative thinking, that same expression could be used to describe Hegel's newspaper.

Community development has been a big part of McGraw's mission since 2009, when he realized that journalists in different media live in parallel worlds. He founded Pop-Up to promote collaboration between writers, photographers, and audio journalists. Since then, the live magazine has partnered with *ESPN the Magazine*, publishing house McSweeney's, and lately, TED. Shows have brought together journalists from different genres, and spawned new stories that wouldn't have come to life otherwise, contributors say.

And for Pop-Up and others, the sense of community extends beyond contributors. A 2014 report funded by the National Science Foundation and based on surveys of thousands of attendees at *Radiolab*'s two latest live shows found

that audiences were surprised and excited to discover a whole community of fellow fans. They reported that their affinity for the program grew as a result of the live show, while those who were less familiar with the brand indicated a desire to start listening. Though hard numbers are elusive, *Radiolab* staff experience the live shows as a highly effective way of expanding their audience base, says executive producer Ellen Horne.

Big media-run conferences aim to capitalize on the so-called Experience Economy, a commercial buzz-phrase from 1998 that refers to the notion that successful companies are increasingly providing experiences, rather than goods and services. But the business potential of performed journalism may still be unfulfilled, since most organizers say money is not the goal. While Pop-Up

from the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania, who researches the cultural dimensions of journalism. "There's a growing recognition that these platforms offer an engagement with current events that perhaps isn't being attended to or provided by mainstream journalism."

So far, performed journalism has barely been discussed as journalism; it is more often talked about as art or entertainment. That doesn't concern many supporters of the genre. "Part of the idea behind Pop-Up was not caring so much about these distinctions," says McGraw, who defines the live magazine as a journalistic project that also falls within the categories of art and entertainment. But he and others do believe that the genre holds potential for journalism more broadly.

Making yourself vulnerable onstage is audience engagement at a whole other level.

has become a sustainable business without an original growth plan, live shows don't necessarily turn impressive profits for *Radiolab* due to the scale of its productions, which can involve everything from professional dancers to elaborate puppetry. At *This American Life*, live shows usually make money and have sometimes proven an effective way to fill budget holes, although some of the more expensive productions generate no extra funds for the radio show. What the shows do, however, is allow producers to experiment, director of operations Seth Lind says.

Defining this phenomenon as performed journalism may seem provocative. But while the New Journalism raised eyebrows when it mixed the techniques of journalism with those of the novel in the 1960s and 70s, today's information environment shows an increased mingling of journalism and the arts, says Professor Barbie Zelizer

Radiolab reports stories from scratch, while Pop-Up stories often build on individual journalists' work in progress, but all three only stage material that has never been performed before. Reported stories are structured and developed with the intention of being performed live, and visual, auditory, and performative elements are thought into the production of each piece. At the other end of the spectrum, *The Guardian* and *This American Life* have staged journalism as theater, and in 2013, *The Center for Investigative Reporting* entered a collaboration with a theater company to stage plays based on investigative stories. None of this is new.

In the 1930s, as a response to the Great Depression, unemployed journalists and theater workers teamed up through the Federal Theatre Project to produce the so-called "Living Newspapers," which staged current events for a popular, largely working-class audience.

Reporters carried out research, and writers turned the information into plays that often focused on pressing social issues such as conditions in city slums, class politics, and lynchings.

The Living Newspapers were born out of dire conditions that forced people to think about new ways of engaging with current events; they saw the theater's role as both to inform and to engage audiences. Today's performed journalism is doing something similar. "We love putting pieces onstage that not only teach people things, but also give them an emotional experience," said Walters, the Pop-Up editor. "That not only tell them, let's say, what it's like to pay your way through college as a shepherd, but help them feel it, through specific details, recorded audio, visuals, music, and more."

Theater is a shared physical experience that creates a relationship between the audience and whoever is onstage. At Pop-Up Magazine, that experience is reinforced by the fact that the audience is asked to turn off all digital devices, and the show goes undocumented. In a 2009 PBS interview with acclaimed playwright and actress Anna Deavere Smith, known for documentary productions in which she has interpreted and staged real-life interviews with Americans about issues such as race and violence, Bill Moyers noted: "There is no way this small screen of television can do justice to the power of what happens on your stage. ... You took a houseful of strangers and turned them into an intimate community."

"I suppose the intimacy comes from the audience having a shared experience," Smith answered.

Memorable experiences are formed when individuals feel emotionally, physically, or intellectually engaged; indeed, the more senses an experience engages, the more memorable it is. In performed journalism, that personal, memorable experience seems tied to the audience-performer relationship that is so basic to the theater. When a journalist like *Mother Jones'* Butler leaves her natural habitat and embraces the performative aspect of live storytelling, she becomes a real-life person to her audience. Journalists talk about engaging with their audience on

Twitter, but making yourself vulnerable on a stage is audience engagement at a whole other level.

That is likely why performed journalism thrives in the world of radio and podcasts. The much-discussed success of *Serial* shed light on these platforms' unique ability to foster audience commitment through the intimacy of the medium. The strong connection between Sarah Koenig and her listeners was based in part on her willingness to share thoughts and insights that journalists usually keep to themselves.

Like the social and political theater movements of the mid-twentieth century, performed journalism offers an opportunity to explain complex issues or ideas through sensory elements that help audiences visualize and remember stories. In September, Pop-Up went further, arranging a dinner show for just 120 attendees in which every part of the meal told its own story. The water glasses, for instance, were marked to indicate the water levels of various reserves in California, suggesting a narrative about the drought that has plagued the state. With more initiatives like these, Pop-Up hopes to become a "lab for live journalism," Walters says.

The Guardian's topical microplays took their inspiration from a popular *Guardian* article about English identity that appeared before the Scottish vote on independence, at a moment when nationalism and xenophobia were on the rise in Britain. In one of the plays, *Death of England*, a grieving son's ranting, intoxicated eulogy for his father mixes feelings of loss with football fandom, nationalistic pride, and racism. The short plays allow for a density of detail and an unspooling of contradictory ideas that a short piece of newspaper journalism probably wouldn't, says stage editor Wiegand.

Amelia Gentleman, who writes on social affairs for *The Guardian*, says the microplay she helped shape achieved something that her journalism couldn't. *Britain Isn't Eating* satirizes conservative politicians' skepticism about underprivileged people's need for food banks by staging a TV cooking show in which a fictional politician attempts to create a meal out of sardines, bags of tea, raspberry vinegar, and a can of tomato soup.

Gentleman says she sometimes worries that new readers fail to connect with her journalism on austerity, and she found that the play's use of humor made it both thought-provoking and accessible. "Different people will be able to watch that and be forced to think about issues from a completely different perspective," she says.

This American Life did a similar dramatization of journalism with its June show at BAM. But while *The Guardian's* microplays are a far step from the outlet's journalism, *This American Life's* style of storytelling has previously been criticized for being too close to fiction, most famously when Mike Daisey's 2012 story about his alleged visit to a factory in China, where workers supposedly produced Apple devices under arduous conditions, was proven to be false. *This American Life* retracted the story, but Daisey, though apologetic, initially excused the fabrication by saying he has a background in theater, not journalism. The two disciplines, he claimed, "have different languages for what the truth means." In a later blog post, he conceded that he had broken the contract with his audience, who were expecting a true story.

While journalists obsess over factual accuracy, audiences may care less as long as they know what they're in for. Lind of *This American Life* says the dramatized show isn't problematic as long as things are labeled clearly: "If we call it *The Radio Drama Show*, then I don't think anyone thinks they're in the land of pure journalism anymore. That doesn't risk tarnishing the brand. The risk would be to not try new things and have people get bored with it."

It's that lack of concern for traditional categories that defines this whole range of live shows, and that enables them to partially imitate the effects of the newspapers Tocqueville found in 19th-century America, and the one Hegel described. As the modern media ponder how to convey news and engage audiences, inspiration might be found in the old-fashioned innovation of performed journalism. **CJR**

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Not a pretty book

In his second memoir, Kevin Sessums is still writing for his life

BY JULIA M. KLEIN

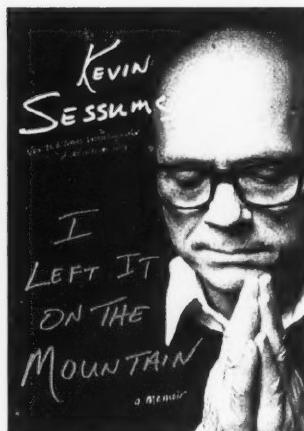
IN KEVIN SESSUMS' 2007 COMING-OF-age memoir, *Mississippi Sissy*, an early mentor describes the demeanor that would contribute to Sessums' success as a celebrity interviewer for *Vanity Fair*, *Parade*, and other publications:

"Don't ask me why," Frank Hains, a newspaper editor, theater columnist, and stage director, tells the teenage Sessums, "but I trust you completely. You are remarkably free of judgment and yet you are preternaturally wary. It's a nice combination. You seem to be spying right there out in the open all the time, right there in our midst . . . It's quite disarming."

In the company of Hains, whose literary circle included Eudora Welty, Sessums remembers enjoying a rare respite from loneliness. *Mississippi Sissy* won praise as an assured, richly detailed narrative of a gay youth's encounters with love and death.

But it's a work that hints at the narrator's unreliability. In an author's note, Sessums writes of the rich, novelistic conversations he recreates: "The dialogue—as true to these people and events and what was said around me as my memory can possibly make it—is my own invention. I was not carrying around a recording device when growing up in Mississippi. But what I did have, even then, was my writer's ear. I listened."

Another warning is a legal disclaimer on the copyright page, not a typical one



I Left It On the Mountain
By Kevin Sessums
St. Martin's Press
288 pages, \$25.99

for a memoir: "This is a work of fiction. All of the characters, organizations, and events portrayed in the novel are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously." This seems to contradict another assertion in the author's note: "All the people and the names are real. All the events actually occurred."

So what exactly are we to believe? Even if the dialogue is invented or embellished, can Sessums be trusted on the core facts, or at least the emotional truth, of his story? Are his comments on his own reliability as a narrator credible?

And how do these doubts influence our reading of his less polished, and even more graphic, second memoir, *I Left It on the Mountain*?

If *Mississippi Sissy* was a classic *Bildungsroman* with tragic Dickensian undercurrents, *I Left It on the Mountain* is a clumsy mash-up of several currently popular memoir forms: the addiction struggle, the quest for redemption, the walk in the wilderness. It lurches backward and forward in time, repeating some material from the first memoir. Awkwardly written and confusingly structured, it does achieve the dubious feat of plunging readers deep into Sessums' fragile, conflicted psyche.

Sessums' middle-age troubles include a positive HIV status; concurrent addictions to crystal meth and promiscuous, anonymous, violent sex; and the resulting decimation of his career and bank account.

His struggles can likely be traced, at least in part, to the shattering events of his rural Mississippi childhood—horrible even by Southern Gothic standards. By the age of 8, he had lost both parents: his often gruff, disciplinarian father to an auto accident, and his beloved mother to cancer. He and his younger brother and sister were raised by their maternal grandparents, both politically conservative and racist in the fashion of their time and place. A black housekeeper named Matty May, who adored Sidney Poitier and schooled Sessums on race relations, supplied a dose of maternal warmth. But Sessums recounts feeling like a misfit, set apart by his emerging sexuality, his literary inclinations, and his liberal politics.

The boy's fatherlessness and isolation were catnip to a pedophilic preacher, who molested him on at least two occasions when he was 13. Two years earlier, Sessums had been the victim of a sexual assault by a stranger in a movie theater showing (perhaps too neatly) the 1967 thriller *Wait Until Dark*. His youth ended with another excruciating, violent loss—the murder of his friend and mentor Hains. Soon afterward he decamped to the Juilliard School to train as an actor, which is where the first memoir left us.

Sessums' arrival in New York offered a welcome introduction to a more

cosmopolitan world. Older gay men—beginning with Henry Geldzahler, the city's commissioner of cultural affairs—invited him into their social circles. Through Geldzahler, he “gained entry into the Manhattan of private screenings, gallery openings, uptown parties, downtown dinners at Odeon . . .” But Sessums’ traumatic past, sometimes suppressed, never entirely receded; he used it to inform his work—his acting, the celebrity interviews, the first memoir. And then it overtook him.

One of the new memoir’s two epigraphs is a quotation drawn from an 1819 letter by the poet John Keats: “Do you not see how necessary a world of pains and trouble is to school an intelligence and make it a soul?” In Sessums’ case, his vulnerability was paired with an almost obsessive attraction to celebrity, and comfort with it. Along with his acting experience and connections gleaned from a stint as a factotum at Paramount Pictures, those qualities helped him find common ground with others who, beneath their stardom and allure, also were hurting.

In explaining the connection, Sessums says much of his childhood was spent “seeking the comfort I felt nesting in the presence of such creatures on the television or in the movies.” As a boy, he held “secret conversations” with stars, “imagining they were the ones who understood how trapped I felt in my otherness, in the Mississippi countryside, in my grief.”

Moving from Paramount to Andy Warhol’s *Interview* magazine, and then *Vanity Fair*, Sessums found a career that seemed an ideal emotional fit: “At the very moment when I alighted in the nest that a conversation with a celebrity created, I became that comforted child once more . . . With someone famous, I could be my truest self.”

Sessums cultivated a diverse circle of what he calls “heightened acquaintances.” Madonna, Courtney Love, Michael J. Fox, Daniel Radcliffe, Hugh Jackman, Diane Sawyer, Tom Cruise, Michelle Williams, and Jessica Lange are among the names he drops. The memoir’s second epigraph is an excerpt from a 1983 letter to Sessums from the poet Howard Moss: “[Y]ou seem to be known by everyone.”

At one point, Sessums declares that he “came to define” celebrity journalism, but he quickly denigrates the accomplishment. While Warhol’s Factory epitomized “tacky glamour,” at *Vanity Fair*, “[t]ackiness was more expertly tucked into the glamour . . . camouflaged, so highly styled it became a kind of knowing exaltation of it until the exaltation was itself nothing but a lark.” His own persona was that of “The Impertinent Fawner.” He was not a journalist, he says, but “a writer who could carry on a conversation and shape a narrative.”

Still, he tried at times to go beyond the puff piece to “mine the ore of stardom, if not art, and find its seam and in so doing perhaps discover the very essence of that person.” The book offers examples—this time, clearly from tape recordings—of his confessional interview style, which did not include candor about his increasingly debauched lifestyle. When Daniel Radcliffe looks “a little shocked” at Sessums’ appearance following a sleepless orgiastic night, the writer claims to have been kept awake by “a stomach bug.”

I Left It on the Mountain stops far short of being a celebrity tell-all. (Sessums, now editor in chief of the upscale San Francisco magazine *FourTwoNine*, still needs those “heightened acquaintances.”) Instead, it is a patchwork of reminiscences organized by roles Sessums has assumed: “The Starfucker,” “The Climber,” “The Mentor,” “The Pilgrim,” “The Dogged” (about his dogs!), “The Addict,” and so on.

Addiction and spiritual struggle are the memoir’s leitmotifs. The alternately gut-wrenching and ecstatic descriptions of Sessums’ drug use and sexual binges make his ambivalence manifest. These are juxtaposed with accounts of two spiritually inspired pilgrimages, à la Cheryl Strayed—to the top of Mount Kilimanjaro and along the Camino de Santiago de Compostela.

The Kilimanjaro climb is Sessums’ belated response to his HIV diagnosis. “If I submitted my body to an experience as unforgiving as the climb up Mount Kilimanjaro,” he asks himself, “would I be able to find a way to forgive myself for the predicament I had caused by behavior far more dangerous than any mountain climb could prove to be?”

Whatever efficacy the climb has, it is temporary. His life in disarray, Sessums decides in 2009 to walk the Camino, a famous pilgrimage of more than 500 miles across northern Spain. The memoir incorporates what he describes as a diary of the trip, a vivid account of its physical hardships, moments of pleasurable companionship, and occasional epiphanies. On the trail, Sessums yearns (once again) to put aside his anger and find forgiveness; he hopes that “the brutality will live on as memory. The spiritual light will be what survives.”

But the Camino is no solution, either. Sessums cannot hang on to his sobriety. On July 4, 2010, he reaches a new low—and a new high—by injecting meth, which causes hallucinations. He paints his struggle to stay clean amid numerous relapses in grandiose terms, as a conflict involving Lucifer and various Eastern deities. “Addiction, I came to understand, is the proxy battle for the soul,” he writes. “I was in the middle of a pitched one, its violence veiled in beauty.”

Meanwhile, his downward spiral accelerates, halted periodically by the proverbial bottom: unemployment, destitution, homelessness, reliance on the uncertain kindness of friends, relatives, and strangers. For an addict, the well of favors quickly runs dry; as Sessums tells it, even his own brother reneges on a promise to send him to rehab.

I Left It on the Mountain isn’t a pretty or an especially artful book. One senses, though, that Sessums is, more than ever, writing for his life. He has always regarded that life as the stuff of narrative, he says—a way of coping with losing his parents at such a young age. “I have often thought that my impulse to write is a way to solve all the silence they left me with,” he says.

The shaping of the tale is, of course, a way of imposing control on psychic chaos. But this second memoir is itself chaotic, a jagged mosaic of thought, incident, and sensation. There is no disclaimer or apology, no suggestion that this time we are reading fiction. **CJR**

JULIA M. KLEIN, a CJR contributing editor, is a cultural reporter and critic in Philadelphia. Follow her on Twitter (@JuliaMKlein).

REVIEW

Bias or bombast?

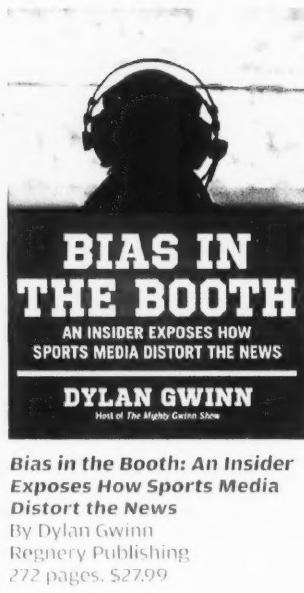
A talk-show host's attack on the 'liberal sports media' falls flat

BY JUSTIN PETERS

YOU CAN SAY THIS FOR DYLAN GWENN, at least: He gets to the point. A mere two paragraphs into his new book, *Bias in the Booth: An Insider Exposes How Sports Media Distorts the News*, Gwinn has already asserted his provocative thesis: "This is a book about how virtually the entire sports media have been overrun with liberal activists trying to implement and advance their liberal agenda." This is a man with no time or patience for rhetorical foreplay, and I, for one, applaud his directness. America's book-readers are busy people, and authors who encapsulate their theses right up top like this are doing these readers a favor by helping them determine whether or not a book is worth their time.

So I'm sure Gwinn will understand if I, too, am direct: This book is *not* worth your time. This book is very dumb. This book exposes nothing except its author's own rhetorical limitations. A keening, bitter catalog of slights and allegations of willful journalistic malpractice, *Bias in the Booth* is less an analysis than a screed, reliant on *ad hominem* attacks, suppositions, and generalizations in its bid to document the purported liberal bias of American sports media.

Many sports journalists undoubtedly do consider themselves liberals. But Gwinn too often simply asserts this liberalism without providing supporting evidence, and then assumes a causal relationship between these journalists'



Bias in the Booth: An Insider Exposes How Sports Media Distort the News
By Dylan Gwinn
Regnery Publishing
272 pages, \$27.99

presumed personal beliefs and the stories they choose to cover. His shaky premises ultimately serve to undermine the entire book. *Bias in the Booth* might be worth reading for entertainment's sake, depending on your taste for bombastic conservative agita, but it is not worth taking seriously.

That's a shame, because there's an interesting book to be written about how the political rhetoric of sport has

evolved in the internet era, and how athletic imagery can be manipulated for cultural and political ends. I would love to see a serious conservative writer address these topics, and critically examine whether the rise of hamster-wheel journalism and opinionated online commentary have made it easier to use sports and sports media as platforms for political statements.

Gwinn is not the man to do it. A sports radio host in Houston, Gwinn's writing style leans heavily on quips, bluster, and presumptions. In his book, he adopts the persona of an aggrieved sporting everyman, speaking up for the common fan, who is forever "wanting to shout, 'Shut up and give me the box score!'" He writes from a standpoint of what the critic Jim Sleeper has called *ressentiment*: a keen sense of his own disempowerment in a world that has been rearranged without his knowledge or consent; a feeling that the best way to resist the winds of change is to yell into them.

Gwinn considers sports a form of escapism, a refuge from the world of serious things, and he resents any violation of this sacred, purportedly neutral space. "Like many of you," he writes, "I remember a time when people flocked to sports because they were fun and entertaining, even awe-inspiring at their best, and an escape from the BS and politically correct hysteria of the 'real world.'"

But those halcyon days are gone, Gwinn writes, thanks to joyless PC scolds intent on making every kickoff and first pitch a forum for liberal political commentary. He sees evidence for this everywhere. The movement to get the Washington Redskins football team to change its name to something that couldn't be interpreted as a racial slur? Nothing but "holier-than-thou groupthink" from liberal sports commentators who "want to feel like their careers mean something." What about the publicity given to Michael Sam, or the basketball player Jason Collins? Easy: "Professional sports leagues are keenly aware that gay activism has become the new liberal cause célèbre, and they want to be at its forefront." The growing consensus that football is a dangerous game, and that its players risk traumatic brain injury and other health problems? An attempt by the "liberal sports media" to

destroy a sport that they consider “the ultimate expression of the unreformed American spirit—chauvinistic, competitive, and even too Christian.”

Gwinn can’t stand it, and he assumes that you can’t, either. “Almost every sports fan wants sports to be a politics-free zone, and our job as media isn’t to insert realism into people’s escapism,” he writes. This sort of assumed consensus—“almost every sports fan,” as if Dylan Gwinn spends his nights and weekends standing in stadium parking lots handing out surveys—might play well on talk radio, but it’s exhausting when translated into print. Gwinn writes with all the subtlety you’d expect from someone who spends his days arguing with people named “Car Phone John.” The book is filled with lazy, fraught terms like “thought police,” and “left-wing media machine.” Twitter users who assert liberal opinions are “mouth-breathers in their pajamas.” “We’re fast approaching the point where there’s going to be no real difference between Bob Costas and Rachel Maddow,” Gwinn writes. “Except one of them is a man. I think.”

I’m all for insult comedy, but when it comprises this much of your argument, it’s usually an indication that you don’t actually have much of an argument. And Gwinn doesn’t. He has observations and assumptions, lots of them, but fails to assemble them into a coherent, persuasive case for a systemic liberal bias in American sports media. While Gwinn asserts that the politicization of sport and the surrounding discourse is a new phenomenon, he fails to adequately prove this, instead repeatedly appealing to loose feelings of nostalgia as evidence that things used to be different. “Political news and commentary were something you didn’t often find in sports, because they were contentious and harsh, a serious business where the burdens of the real world were hung around your neck,” Gwinn writes in his introduction.

But public sport has been a political activity since antiquity, and not just in the “bread and circuses” sense. Sport is a reflection and reinforcement of cultural norms, and for most of the 20th century, I would contend, sport was a tool for reinforcing heteronormative masculinity and the illusion of meritocracy. It still is,

to a very real extent, and Gwinn surely knows this. Almost every single professional sporting event in America will, at some point, pause to salute a military veteran in attendance. When this person is announced, fans are expected to rise and cheer. “God Bless America” is usually sung. This is political.

But cultural norms are shifting, in part because “the media” is no longer as monolithically insular as it once was, no longer in a position to uniformly define and reinforce those norms. The rise of the internet has disaggregated reporting and commentary and made it easier for unorthodox voices to work their way into the sporting conversation. Gwinn ascribes this shift to a pervasive and inchoate liberalism that has poisoned the press box like toxic runoff seeping into groundwater.

Though Gwinn claims he is equally opposed to all forms of politicized sporting rhetoric, it is clear that he is really upset that a bunch of political liberals have seized the microphone. “For the sports media, the enemy is always the same: conservatives and Christians,” writes Gwinn. “The ‘ground’ the liberal sports media want to break is the ground of traditional Christian morality.”

Gwinn contrasts the coverage of Collins and Sam with the coverage of Tim Tebow, the former University of Florida quarterback and avowed Christian whose brief stint in the NFL was marked by underwhelming on-field performance and overwhelming off-field coverage. Tebow, claims Gwinn, was “marked for destruction” by the liberal media, who focused their coverage on Tebow’s athletic limitations and religious beliefs, and occasionally seemed eager to see the quarterback fail. “Could you imagine if Tebow had shouted, ‘Jesus is coming!’ before running a zone read or a quarterback sneak?” Gwinn asks. (He is very fond of arguing via hypotheticals.) “Bob Costas would have had a stroke.”

This is inane. Before, during, and after his short stint in the NFL, Tim Tebow received more media coverage than most athletes in recent memory. ESPN openly instructed its on-air personalities that “you can’t talk enough Tebow.” If Tebow had yelled “Jesus is coming!” during a football game for some reason, the story would have led

SportsCenter for weeks, and the NFL would have sold a million Tebow jerseys. Certain individual bloggers and reporters might have disliked Tebow for his personal beliefs, but “the media” as an entity couldn’t get enough of him.

Gwinn ignores this, perhaps because it indicates something that might contradict his dyspeptic thesis. It seems obvious that the real difference between today’s sporting scene and that of Gwinn’s youth is the arrival of huge sums of money into sporting ownership. Sports teams are billion-dollar corporations; sports broadcast contracts are billion-dollar businesses, too. The Los Angeles Clippers, a historically terrible NBA team, recently sold for \$2 billion. The people who have bought into this industry have billions of reasons to want to protect and grow their investments.

So, okay, big corporations are simultaneously cautious and avaricious. They are loath to offend consumer groups. This is why the Clippers’ former owner, Donald Sterling, was forced to sell the team after audio recordings surfaced of him making racially insensitive statements. This is why Rush Limbaugh was forced out of the *Monday Night Football* broadcast booth after suggesting that the former Eagles quarterback Donovan McNabb, who is black, owed his prominence not to his athletic talents, but to his skin color. The sporting “powers that be” squelch this sort of racially charged commentary not because they are liberals, but because they are capitalists.

And because they are capitalists, when they have a product that’s worth selling, they will go all out in their efforts to sell it. Michael Sam and Jason Collins get a lot of media coverage for the same reason that Tim Tebow gets a lot of coverage: They are extremely marketable. (Though not necessarily employable: None of them is currently on a professional sports team’s active roster.) Do these stories travel farther and resound louder in this age of media disintermediation than they did in the networks-and-newspapers days? Sure. But it’s not because of some liberal media conspiracy. That’s my take, at least. Now I’ll hang up and listen for Dylan Gwinn’s answer. **CJR**

JUSTIN PETERS is a CJR contributing editor.

No charred partridges

Love and fear in the work of Michael Paterniti

BY JOE KEOHANE

IN 1985, A 23-YEAR-OLD SPANISH CHEF was asked to cook a partridge. *Escabeche de perdiz*, a standard dish. Like countless chefs all over Spain, he had made it countless times, but now, faced with the task of cooking it again, he froze. He just couldn't do it.

"How to deal with this sad bird?" the celebrated magazine journalist Michael Paterniti writes in his book, *Love and Other Ways of Dying*. "Wasn't there something greater, some secret waiting for release in this food? Perhaps [he] had no right to see the partridge for what it wasn't, or for the multiplicity of what it could be, but if eating is as necessary as laughter or a sob, then where was the emotion in having charred partridge delivered to your table?"

It was nowhere, of course; it had been bled out by the years of mindless repetition. So the chef began to riff. He pinched the meat from its bones; peppered it and mixed it with asparagus, leeks, onions, carrots, zucchini, and finally, lobster, and sent it out to the dining room: an ecstatically deconstructed Mediterranean partridge. And to his surprise, it wasn't sent back. The diner discovered great unexpected pleasure where before there had been merely convention. The world discovered the incomparable Ferran Adrià, who went on to found elBulli. And for a time, in a remote little pocket of a world teeming

with charred partridges, there were no more charred partridges.

IN THE PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS FOR *Love and Other Ways of Dying*, a selection of Paterniti's previously published *Esquire*, *GQ*, *Harper's*, and *New York Times Magazine* pieces, a publicist, displaying her tribe's native incapacity for embarrassment, predicts success for this book due to an "EXPLOSION OF INTEREST IN LONGFORM," adding, "recently the longform style of nonfiction has gained a massive following."

But the fatalist wonders if this explosion of interest isn't actually an explosion of concern for the viability of longform work. And that concern is warranted. Not only because we're exiting the era of contract writers—which allowed slow, meticulous workers like Paterniti to take time with a piece—but also because in order for there to be good writing, there has to be good reading, meaning there have to be good readers, willing to stick with a story when it meanders, and feel a story when it hurts, and even be exasperated by a story when it overreaches or loses its way.

Such attentiveness and care is required by Paterniti's work, which shows an unshakable faith in both the power and range of great magazine stories and the reader's ability to read and appreciate them, even when the going gets rough. Whether he's writing about a

crippled jetliner that hits the sea with such force that it "degloves" its passengers, stripping meat from their bones and depositing a single heart onto the surface of the water; a Ukrainian farm boy transformed into a sorrowful giant by a nick of a surgeon's scalpel; or the pathologist who stole Einstein's brain, Paterniti's stories are animated by deep reportorial curiosity. They also share a spirit of restless experimentation and philosophical inquiry. Here, facts have been formed into meditations and incantations, torqued and pressed and styled until they cough up their secrets and reveal, if only fleetingly, glimpses of far bigger game than mere giants and geniuses and air disasters: love, fear, oblivion. To tell these stories straight would be to neglect the multiplicity of the partridge.

ALL OF THIS, I RECOGNIZE, MAY MAKE these pieces sound rather bloated and purple, everything newspaper writers hate about magazine writing. And sometimes they are. Sometimes they come apart under all the futzing and stylization. The book, for example, contains several profiles in the second person. And sometimes alchemy turns into Frankenstein, as when the Ukrainian giant story is bent into a metaphor for Paterniti's own efforts to raise a family. But in most instances, these pieces are extraordinary.

Take, if you will, the degloving.

"The Long Fall of Flight One-Eleven Heavy," Paterniti's *Esquire* report on the 1998 crash of Swissair Flight 111 into the sea off a small Nova Scotia fishing village after suffering an electrical failure, is the kind of story you will read, and never forget, and never want to read again, and maybe wish you'd never read in the first place. Not just for its effectiveness in capturing in genuinely horrifying detail what a plane crash does to the human body (the engines were still firing when it hit the water), but also for conveying what is lost to all when that human body ceases to exist.

It's about what was recovered—money, shoes, that floating heart—and how, but also what can never be, and why. We see a widow, maybe in shock, maybe half-mad with grief, trying to reassemble her husband's hand, which has been sent to her by crash investigators. ("I can get

the thumb,' she said, 'but I can't get the next part.'") We see bereaved families sleeping with torn shirts and stuffed animals recovered from the sea. We see a father and his wife promise to "stop their imaginations at that place where their daughter had boarded the plane, their minds would not wander past that particular rope," and then we see the father wander past it and pay dearly.

But we also imagine the people as they are marked for death. We get some of their backstories, and we're made to ponder the unfairness that they never knew the end was upon them as they packed and traveled to the airport. "Like lovers who haven't yet met or one-day neighbors living now in different countries, tracing their route to one another, each of them moved toward the others without knowing it," Paterniti writes. "Do you remember the last time you felt the wind? Or touched your lips to the head of a child? Can you remember the words she said as she last went, a ticket in hand?"

In the hands of a lesser writer, this would risk melodrama, but with Paterniti it makes the story hurt. It makes you steal furtive glances at the front door, waiting, a little anxiously, for your wife or husband or mother or child to come home. It's not literary nonfiction, whatever that's supposed to be; it's journalism elevated beyond its ordinary capacities, well into the realm of literature.

"THE LONG FALL OF FLIGHT ONE-eleven Heavy" opens the book, which feels like a misstep, as it's so dark that it throws off the balance of the rest of the collection. (Reading the ecstatic account of eating at elBulli afterwards, at least at first, feels vaguely inappropriate.) But it does succeed in establishing the twin preoccupations to which Paterniti will return again and again in these pages: love, and the cosmic injustice of dying an impersonal death.

There is a very high body count here, often from plane crashes. The merciful Yankee great Thurman Munson—whose many loves and contradictions are beautifully reported—is burned alive in a small plane crash. Another jetliner goes down into a frozen river in Washington, DC, "bodies floating round, human hands and legs trying to hang on to the wrecked tail of the plane like toddlers

without water wings," spurring a government clerk to an act of insane heroism.

Even when no planes actually crash, air disasters are a persistent metaphor. The maligned partridge dish is described as looking like "it had been electrocuted at altitude, in midflight, and then had fallen two miles to the plate, battered and charred." A profile of "Alfred," a homeless, stateless man who has lived at de Gaulle airport for 15 years, takes a sudden turn:

It's possible that our most religious moments occur in airports rather than in churches Apprehension, longing, and the fear of complete disintegration—what palpably animates an airport full of passengers about to take to heaven at the speed of sound—is what drives us to our gods.

The disasters don't unfold solely in the air. The 2010 Haiti earthquake sends a police chief walking across ruined Port-au-Prince in search of his daughters, who are almost certainly dead, encountering along the way "arms and legs dangling from the compacted buildings, limbs set at oblique angles, the dust-covered dead appearing as ghosts." A man sees his wife washed away by the 2011 Japan tsunami after he blithely assured her that they needn't flee. He quickly realizes his error. "This force is greater than the force of memory, or regret, or fear," Paterniti writes. "It's the force of an impersonal death, delivered by thousands of pounds of freezing water." The man winds up nine miles out to sea on his roof, scrawling, "On March 11, I was with my wife, Yuko. My name is Hiromitsu," on the pages of a comic book that floated up to him. Later, back on land but still hopelessly adrift, he pens a lament about how she never comes to him in his dreams.

And in these pieces, humanity is every bit as capable of delivering impersonal death as nature or mechanical failure. In a story about the Khmer Rouge, Paterniti meets one of the seven survivors of the notorious camp S-21, and ponders the character of the man's tormenter, who later claimed he only did what he did because his superiors threatened to kill his family if he refused—an argument that finds sympathy with the tormenter's Cambodian defense attorney, himself a victim of the Khmer Rouge. After Columbine, Paterniti ponders a

student killed shortly after completing her college application: "That's what's most hard to imagine: how in midsentence, in the throes of some idea, in the beginning of some meaningful life, the girl was entered by some dark, crippled thing and became a memory."

IN AN INTRODUCTORY ESSAY, PATERNITI states his theme:

The more willing we are to suffer pain and loss and even great throes of happiness, to live fully inside these big emotions, the closer we come to—what?
The folded hands of the universe?
Our humanity?
Infinity?
It must be something.

Ultimately, it's the meaning of life he's after. With each piece, he's telling the foundational story of the human species: matter seeking meaning before reverting to dust. And he's telling that story at such great length, and with enough side trips, plane trips, road trips, dinners, and hotel stays that it's impossible not to gaze upon them and think, *this must have cost a fortune*. And then to wonder if this kind of work is destined for an impersonal death of its own, at the hands of some other dumb and implacable force, like falling ad revenues or shrinking reader attention.

Who knows. Maybe people never really read the big, heavy magazine stories in the first place, and we never knew because there was no real way to gauge interest, or we never really cared because revenues were strong enough that such efforts could be underwritten without having to lay off an editorial assistant and two photographers.

Or maybe people did read them, and they will rally, and continue reading them, and more importantly, pay for the experience. I hope they do, and I hope that these pieces in particular, and big, deep, beautiful stories in general, continue to find audiences big enough to inspire future generations of writers and publishers to take chances and honor the boundless multiplicity of the human organism, as Paterniti has done here. **CJR**

JOE KEOHANE is a writer and editor in New York. Follow him on Twitter (@JoeKeohane).



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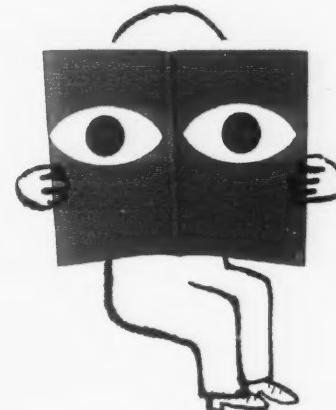
BY JAMES BOYLAN

**The Invention of News:
How the World Came to Know
About Itself**

By Andrew Pettegree
Yale University Press
445 pages. \$35; paper. \$25

The Invention of News arrives with honors, as the winner of the 2015 Goldsmith Book Prize given by the Harvard Kennedy School, Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy. Its author is a distinguished scholar of Renaissance and Reformation history at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland; he also directs the university's Universal Short Title Catalogue, comprising more than 350,000 items published in Europe between the invention of printing and the end of the 16th century.

It is no surprise, then, that his history of news rises from his work, geographically and chronologically. The "world" of the subtitle is not the whole world, but that portion of Europe lying west of Poland, north of Africa, and south of Scandinavia; it includes Britain and, with a stretch, the American colonies. The time period he covers runs, roughly, from the 15th century to the end of the 18th. As Pettegree writes, his book "follows the development of a commercial news market from the medieval period—when news was the prerogative of political elites—to a point four hundred years later when news was beginning to play a decisive role in popular polities." Within its geographical and chronological limits, Pettegree's history is packed with detail about the



'The war has used up words;
they have deteriorated like
motor car tires.'

expanding varieties of oral, written, and printed communication; he carefully traces the transformation of news from a service for state, church, and commerce to a product that could be sold to the masses for a profit.

His complexity is a bit of a problem. The compilation of fact upon fact and the twists, turns, and reversals of the narrative may be great for specialists, perhaps less so for generalists. This observation is offered only as a warning and is not meant to discount what is clearly broad, enterprising, and illuminating research. Those who persist can gain a sense of the breadth and complexity of communication across the continent before, during, and after the emergence of printing. Of course, finally came the arrival of the newspaper, just making its way toward dominance. Pettegree suggests that the newspaper—and journalism, for that matter—was initially less a culmination than a letdown, a form that swallowed its predecessors and smothered their variety.

Incidentally, the hardcover version of *The Invention of News* has a handsome, antiqued dust jacket, uncredited. But too many of the examples

of old news forms illustrated within are drab and only semi-legible.

**The War That Used Up Words:
American Writers and the
First World War**

By Hazel Hutchison
Yale University Press
304 pages. \$45

The title of this study comes from a 1915 statement by Henry James, a few months after the start of what was known then as the Great War. Like so much James wrote or said, its meaning falls short of obvious: "The war has used up words; they have weakened, they have deteriorated like motor car tires." The author, Hazel Hutchison of the University of Aberdeen in Scotland, implies that James was hinting that prewar literary modes were already giving way to the next era, which in the 1920s became the age of Eliot, Joyce, and Hemingway. She finds a kind of preview of the harder-hitting postwar literature in the writing done in the midst of the war, including from little-known authors.

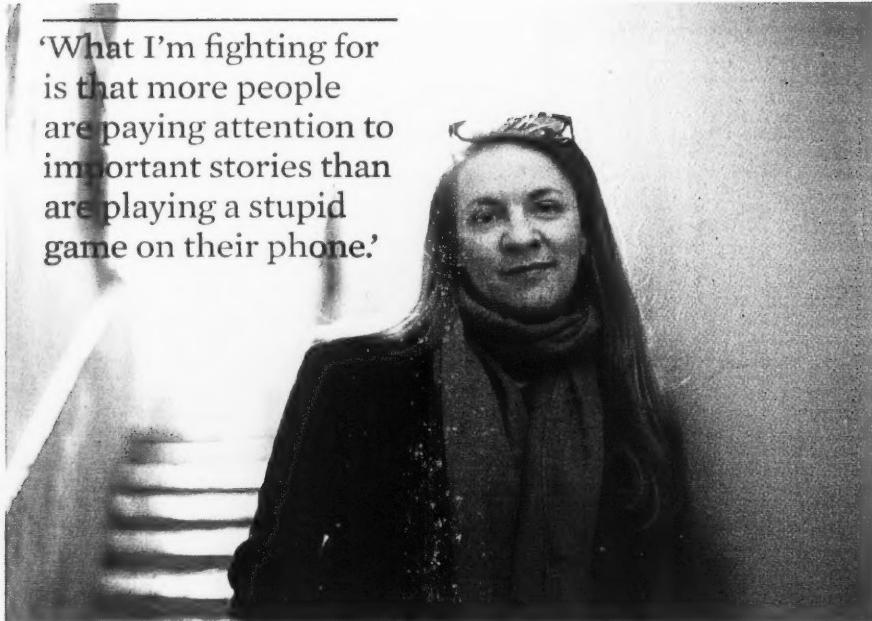
She calls particular attention to nonfiction by two volunteer American nurses working in field hospitals. Mary Borden-Turner wrote much of *The Forbidden Zone*, a "startling and experimental

account," which Hutchison deems "one of the great texts of the First World War," while in charge of a hospital treating hundreds of the wounded. However, she withheld publication until 1929.

Not so for Ellen La Motte, an older American nurse who joined Borden at her hospital. She completed *The Backwash of War*, a book of sardonic sketches about incidents at the field hospital during the first year of the war. The first episode describes an attempted suicide—a soldier who fires a gun into his mouth has to be nursed back to survival so that he can be shot for cowardice, an incident somewhat echoed in Stanley Kubrick's great 1957 film, *Paths of Glory*. La Motte's work was issued in 1916 by the American publisher, G.P. Putnam's Sons. Its distribution was blocked in France and England and, after America's entry into the war, in the United States as well. When she pleaded that what she had written was true, she was told, "That is exactly the trouble." CJR

JAMES BOYLAN is the founding editor of the Columbia Journalism Review and professor emeritus of journalism and history at the University of Massachusetts–Amherst.

'What I'm fighting for is that more people are paying attention to important stories than are playing a stupid game on their phone.'



EXIT INTERVIEW

How to get attention

IN JANUARY, NEWS BROKE THAT **AMY O'LEARY**, THE DEPUTY INTERNATIONAL editor of *The New York Times*, would be leaving to become editorial director at Upworthy. O'Leary's role at the *Times*, where she had worked for eight years, mostly involved helping the paper adapt to the digital world. Most famously, she co-authored an "innovation report," leaked last May, that concluded the paper has struggled to make that transition. Yet, given the *Times'* prestige and Upworthy's reputation for offering breathlessly headlined but often hollow content designed to go viral, it was a move many found surprising. CJR's **Christopher Massie** asked O'Leary about the newspaper she left behind, as well as about her new gig.

Did the *Times* make any strides in its transition to digital in the months between the release of the report and your departure? Absolutely. Everyone read the report, everyone was aware of its primary recommendations. So you had this massive alignment, where everyone from the most seasoned reporters and copy editors to the newest hires working on analytics were all suddenly on the same page and able to move forward together.

How did that new attitude manifest itself? The most obvious way you saw it in the newsroom was that, in addition to all the traditional conversations that editors and reporters have about a story's content or how we were attacking a certain line of coverage, there was also this new conversation that started in a really robust way about, *How are we going to make sure people are reading it?* After reading the report, people realized there were simple things the *Times* could undertake that would carry our journalism much, much farther into readers' lives and homes. And who at the *Times* would be against that? That's why we go into journalism. No one's going to be against thinking more smartly about an email newsletter strategy if we're going to reach a million new readers. No one's going

to be against thinking a little bit more sharply about search-engine optimization or social media if it brings us huge new readership.

The report observed that the separation between the newsroom and the company's business and technology departments created mistrust and a simple lack of information on the editorial side. Did that wall erode during the months after the report came out? We fervently believe that you need some of those walls of separation to protect the newsroom against conflicts of interest. But what happened was that, by an accident of history, these other important groups like research and development, technology, the group that studies and does research about *Times* readers, all of these groups were just considered to be "business side." The guy who built the breaking news alert system wasn't talking to the news desk that was writing the breaking news alerts. That's just, frankly, kind of crazy. But again, once it was pointed out, everyone was like, of course, that's crazy.

Last month, you told my colleague Alexis Sobel Fitts that all media, from The New York Times to BuzzFeed to Upworthy, are "in a battle for people's attention now." In a battle, there are winners and losers. Are you switching sides? It's not that *The New York Times* versus BuzzFeed is the battle that's happening for every minute of someone's attention. It can be between Candy Crush or YouTube videos or whatever app on someone's phone has their attention this minute. What I'm fighting for is that high-quality news and information, the stories that people care about, the issues that matter most actually win in that fight for attention, and that more people are paying attention to those kinds of important stories than are playing a stupid game on their phone. So I'm still on the same side.

If your ideal vision for Upworthy is fulfilled, what will it look like? My ideal vision for Upworthy would be that any time you encounter a story from Upworthy, you are genuinely surprised and moved about an issue in the world that really matters. **CJR**

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